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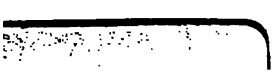

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THE

CATANESE:

OR,

The Real and the Ideal.

BY

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THE CATANESE;

OR,

The Real, and the Ideal.

CHAPTER I.

The closing beams of day fell on the bright sheet of waters, that stretched far away in the distance, now breaking in playful ripples at the feet of whitened cliffs—anon, tossing and lashing in angry confusion, as though maddening at the bonds that confined them—while clouds of sea-spray sparkled like crystal in the golden light.

Sunset on the sea-shore!—A glorious Italian sunset, where, in that land of dreams and poesie, a heaven-born genius illuminated the rough canvas with tints vivid, life-like, bewildering—startling from their truth, and delineation of scenes present, past, and future; of glowing pictures that could only have their being in the artist's brain, whose inward eye, that beautiful, spiritual, mysterious thing, ever turning from the coarse and unlovely, seeks communion with its sister-spirits, and life is but one glorious day-dream. When the harsh, the dull reality presses too heavily on the prisoned soul that swells its ignoble bonds, and pants for freedom, a magic touch loosens his fetters—a sweet, unearthly voice is in the artist's ear, and he is happy!

But he must gaze upon that matchless dream when it is no longer present with him, must live over in remembrance those few, fleeting hours of perfect bliss; and seizing the pencil, with inspired touch he animates the dull canvas. How it glows beneath his hand! The same soft sky, with its

tint of rose deepening to the hazy purple, through which glitters the liquid gold—the rich emerald glow upon the turf and leaves, amid whose foliage peep forth pure and fair the clustering blossoms, like pearly gems—the distant mountains, and the crystal waters—all are there, bright, bewildering as in his glorious dream, but still the last touch is wanting. That dim haze, which, like a tissued veil, shows forth, not dims, the glorious beauty beneath it, must be bright and glowing, pure and soft, and the artist still works on. The lips are crimson with the wild fever of excitement—the cheeks pale from emotion—and the large, dark eye strained wildly after a bewildering vision.

His work is accomplished; there before him, beams the same sweet scene—but with the task, so ends the artist's mission. In that one long look, which well repays his hours of toil, the spirit bursts its bonds, and soars to the bright world of its longing dreams. But still the work is left, the *chef d'œuvre* of a dreamer's life, and passes before the admiring eyes of the brilliant and the beautiful, who carve a marble pile for the gifted dead, and drop scalding tears on the laurel crown, but through whose medium the sleeper had died as he had lived—unknown and unregretted. But this is a picture of one with whom his art was his idol; who hugged it to his bosom and loved it with a pure, undying affection, and sacrificed to it his greatest, best, and most glorious gift—his life!

O Italy! Land of music and of song! Where first breathed those magic strains that sweep across the soul like some angel-touch, low, mournful, wailing, like a lost spirit that seeks in vain its native sphere, and pours forth in music its sorrows, and its wanderings. Yet with all, sweet, trembling, delicious; now low and almost lost in silence, and again breaking forth mournful and sad.

A halo of gold encircled the tops of the distant mountains, that rose proudly to the heavens; the tints of azure and rose blending softly together, while a sweet, chaste, subdued light still lingered over the scene. Now and then the laden boat of some successful fisherman slowly parted the waves as it passed onward to its destination; and while the occupants lazily plied their oars, their full, rich voices joined harmoniously together in the notes of some favorite boat-song. The

music rose and swelled upon the water, blending sweetly with the declining day, and the subdued tints of even.

The scene was rich in picturesque beauty, while around upon the shore, at various distances were grouped the fishermen's huts, most of them formed of plastered mud and clay dried hard by the beams of the sun, with here and there one of rather superior appearance, by the side of which a few bushes or a graceful tree relieved the sameness of the sandy soil. Even these little improvements bespoke some degree of refinement, the pure offspring of nature, as the poor have little time to waste in mere ornament, and are far more occupied with the rugged realities of life, than with the graceful effect of a clustering vine, or the pleasant foliage of a noble tree. In the dark, cheerless streets of the crowded city the carefully treasured box of flowering plants that fills the window ledge, so placed as to catch every scanty gleam of sunshine, insensibly reminds us of a delicate taste, that throwing aside cheap and gaudy ornament, substitutes these children of Heaven, that their pure and modest beauty may perchance throw a cheerful ray on the comfortless chamber of the invalid. We look for a degree of refinement in that squalid abode from the simple circumstance—a refinement that shrinks from association with the coarse, unsympathizing characters around. The fishermen of Catania perhaps never associated these unwonted objects with ideas of the pure and beautiful; perchance regarded them but as the sea-weed which they flung from their nets, without once admiring the delicate and changing tints—murmuring that no heavier burden rewarded their toil.

The dark blue trowsers and red jackets, together with the jet black hair and rather wild appearance of the figures that filled the boats, would have served to conjure up ideas of pirates and banditti; it only needed the dagger and cutlass within those broad leathern belts to make the picture complete. But the fishermen of Catania were a peaceful and quiet people, who banished every spark of romance as derogatory to the interests of their employment, and thought only of pirates and banditti as pests to be guarded against—while fearful tales of their rapacity and cruelty frequently sent them trembling to their beads and prayers.

Here and there a group of bright-eyed children played

merrily upon the beach, pelting each other with handfuls of coral-hued berries, while necklaces of the same hung down upon their bosoms. Among the mountains rose, dark and stern, the outlines of a distant convent; and now, as the notes of its vesper bell broke upon the air, each roguish countenance was subdued to an expression of meek reverence and devotion; and telling each chime upon their beads, they continued their employment till the last note died away in the distance. The oars suspended their labor, the voice of song was hushed upon the waves, and silence was only broken by the solemn tones that seemed to part the air, and then reverberated among the lofty hills. Much has been "said and sung" of the beauty of the vesper bell at eventide; of the indescribable awe, which, linked as it is with the dark, the cruel, and the mysterious, steals imperceptibly into the heart of the devotee, as the sacred tones fall upon his ear, and call him

"To lift the heart, and bend the knee."

The approach of night adds solemnity to the sounds, and the evening breeze bears them on its wings, still deeper and more mournful.

Seated upon the rocks, while the rippling waves played with her small, naked feet, was a young girl of exquisite beauty. Heavy masses of raven hair were gathered into a rich knot behind, through which was carelessly thrust a bodkin of pure gold, and rare workmanship. The high and regular beauty of her features was thus fully exposed; and a spirit of impatient haughtiness broke forth in the flashing of those magnificent eyes, and the proud curve of the Grecian nose. There was an air of high birth about the graceful head; she seemed some solitary princess—a being of nobler stamp, whom fate had mischievously thrown among those of a far inferior grade. A small crucifix rested upon her bosom, and her fingers were busily employed in tracing strange figures upon the sand, to be effaced by each returning tide; though ever and anon she raised those downcast eyes, and gazing far over the blue waters, seemed watching for some boat that came not.

As each busy group passed the maiden, there was a deeper tinge of respect in their manner, than was usually employed

in addressing the daughters of fishermen like themselves. Some are born to command, and others to be commanded; and whatever the station of life may be, the prevailing spirit of the one, and the indolent submission of the other—submission, because it is less exertion, will be clearly perceptible; from the child at play, who is invariably ruler and leader of every game, to those master-spirits that rule in the game of life.

"Beautiful Philippa!" cried a merry-looking youth; "Hast thou remembered thy promise of this morning, and prayed for success to the net of thy humble servant? If so, wilt graciously please to accept the first fruits of his labor that he dedicated to thee?"

Philippa scarcely glanced at the offering which the laughing youth laid at her feet; and replied in a tone of indifference: "Many thanks, Guiseppe; my devotions I see have not been in vain." Shading her eyes with a hand that might grace a duchess, she gazed intently forward over the calm waters as she continued: "Hast seen my father's boat? The night is wearing on, and I fear some evil has befallen him."

The simple-hearted Guiseppe was puzzled to account for this anxiety with respect to her father, who often prolonged his stay beyond that of the other fishermen, and answered hesitatingly:

"I left him with Pietre and Giovanni, still casting his net; though the boat bore ample evidence of his success. No danger can befall him—he is too well acquainted with all the twists and turns in the cleft of rocks for that; so come, Philippa, we will hasten home and examine this sea-monster at our leisure."

But it was not the maiden's *will* to return yet, therefore she remained where she was; and though seemingly listening to the arguments and persuasions of Guiseppe, never wavered from her first intention.

At length she replied: "I cannot come, Guiseppe, until my father's return; have patience till then."

The discomfited suitor was well aware that this would be drawing on a larger amount of patience, than, in the dispensing of that useful article, had been awarded to his share, as the hardy old man seldom returned without a larger booty than any of his companions. But perceiving that Philippa

was inexorable, and unable to account for this sudden whim, he turned reluctantly homeward; stopping at every few steps to glance towards the young girl, who never once turned in that direction. Boat after boat approached the shore; and the fishermen, eagerly hastening to their homes, left Philippa again to her reflections. Long sat the solitary watcher; lights began to gleam from the various cottages, and still she waited. With a scornful smile, the beautiful girl gazed upon the humble village, as though traversing its small dimensions in that single glance—then turning her eyes to the glittering stars above, became absorbed in contemplation. How she yearned for knowledge! That prize pertaining to the gifted few, who so cautiously unlocked the rich casket, and dealt out their treasures to the multitude with a sparing hand—the 'open sesame' to the beautiful, the sublime, and the true. O! for that soul-thrilling, delicious moment, when the mind awakes from its brooding darkness, to scenes of light that burst glorious, bewildering upon the senses! Knowledge, the invisible cloak, the spell-wrought chariot, that could guide the eager mind amid yonder glowing orbs, and unfold the beauties of an invisible world.

At length the sound of a boat grating on the sand aroused the maiden from her reverie; and a man sprang rapidly to the ground. She made a hasty movement of flight—but he stood by her side. Once before had she seen him; he had whispered to her of a brilliant destiny—of beauty transplanted to a more congenial soil, and as though following an unseen impulse, she consented to meet him again.

"Ha! pretty one!" exclaimed the stranger, seizing her hand, "I find thee watching, true to thy promise."

Philippa was proud; hers was not the pride which belongs to outward circumstances, but that of a high and determined character; she felt humiliated by the treatment to which she had subjected herself—and disengaging her hand, and drawing her magnificent figure to its full height, while the dark orbs flashed at this unwelcome freedom, she angrily replied:

"You mistake me; I came here to watch for my father's boat—not for one whose character is unknown to me, but whose manners are far from speaking favorably of it."

The person she addressed was apparently youthful; and

the style of his dress was that of one belonging to the higher ranks. A rich velvet cloak, fastened by a jewelled clasp, was thrown carelessly over his attire, and an air of self-importance seemed struggling with an expression of admiration that rested on his features.

But Philippa was already retracing her steps to the hamlet; and perceiving that his boldness had given offence, he resolved to proceed more cautiously.

"Seest thou yon beaming star, maiden? Not less brilliant the fortune that awaits thee, if thou turnest to the right path in quest of it. Listen—a vision of prophecy opens before me. I see a noble palace; crowned heads and jewelled forms move within the scene, and conspicuous among the rest, I distinguish a woman of rare beauty. A sudden change of light reveals to me her features—they are thine, Philippa! Thine—cast in the same mould, but with a mellowed and glorious beauty, like some splendid statue, that to the eye of the multitude was beautiful before—every feature regular; any attempt at improvement must spoil its exquisite proportions. But the sculptor, he who created this thing of beauty, and made it his own, smiling at the blind admiration of the crowd, takes up his chisel, and with a master-touch gives it a refined, lifelike loveliness, which his quick eye had seen was wanting. So it is with thee, Philippa. The scene changes; the same beautiful woman is there, but her bosom sparkles with jewels, and the coronet of a countess adorns her brow—the features still are thine!"

Philippa gazed intently upon the ground, as though she beheld the vision traced on the sandy shore; the words fell sweetly upon her ear, their very tones were music—'O! could it but be realized!'

Turning a hasty glance upon her companion, she beheld him gazing at her, as he stood with folded arms.

"Thy destiny is read, beautiful Philippa; doth it not please thee?"

"But the end is not here," replied the maiden thoughtfully. "Evil may lurk beneath that jewelled diadem. They say that at the court the secret poison carries off many unconscious victims, who sink to their last rest with faces pale and distorted with anguish, showing fearfully forth beneath the weight of gorgeous jewels. The hidden fire eats into their very heart-

strings, and they pass silently away. But yet, O power! thou art glorious! Glorious to see the trembling crowd bow before thy potent shrine! To satisfy the spirit's yearnings that hath dreamed of thee, as of some far, fair vision—and awake to see the bright illusion vanish. Yes, much indeed might be dared for thee!"

"Listen to me, Philippa," said the stranger, in a low, distinct tone; "power shall be thine, even to thy utmost wishes, for so the Fates have willed it to thee. The thread that they wove was fair and even—and yonder star, thy destiny, burns with a clear, intense light, without one marring cloud. Proud spirits shall bend before thee, even as reeds are swayed by the rushing wind, for so it is written, and it will be fulfilled. But cast around those brilliant orbs over the whole expanse of this sandy village—then turn to the slumbering sea, and bid thy heart choose its kingdom. Tell it," he continued with a sneer, "to assume a high and noble dominion over the unlettered fishermen—or else give it for its empire the sandy shore and senseless deep, where none will dispute the right. Does this satisfy thy cravings?"

The color burned still deeper on her cheek, and the rosy lip curled with scorn, as she gazed around upon the humble scene.

Her companion marked the glance, and said, as if in answer to it: "Yes, beautiful Philippa, that face and form are indeed destined to grace a nobler scene. But sovereigns are not apt to transport their palaces to obscure fishing hamlets, even in quest of one like thee; 'twould be searching for a sparkling gem upon a sandy bed, where it had chanced to drop—and where handfuls of slimy soil and worthless pebbles must first be grasped, ere the jewel is found. Men look in the sea for pearls, and in the far depths of hidden mines for more glowing gems—but not in the muddy soil for either; and yet should one more vigilant bring forth a jewel whence they would not have sought it, and lay it beside those that had boasted a nobler resting-place, its beauties would shine as brightly as theirs, and his companions would not disdain it. *Thou* art the jewel, maiden, and I, the diligent searcher that shall bring those beauties to light."

Philippa now understood his meaning, and turned a full, examining gaze upon his countenance, which was not a very open one. Apparently, the investigation was not satisfactory,

for still examining his lineaments, she spoke as if to herself:

"No—you would substitute the ideal for the real. Your life has been passed in courts, and you could decorate the false image with glittering tinsel and mock gems, to delude my inexperienced eye. A little while to grasp the deception and revel in my dream—and then I should awake to find, in lieu of the promised light, greater darkness than ever. I should look in vain for the voluntary homage, and ready submission; I—I alone would be the slave. If the destiny you have promised does indeed await me, it will reach me even here—but I go not with you."

The stranger gazed upon her a moment in surprise; he was evidently astonished at the truth of her reasoning, and for the first time it seemed to flash upon his own mind; but realizing his thoughts quickly, he replied:

"Nay, I cannot deem thee in earnest, maiden, thus to cast away a brilliant destiny. The devotion of *one* heart is thine already, and the flowers of love fade not so quickly. What better opportunity than the present for bidding farewell forever to a scene so little suited to one like thee? The plodding peasants are busy at their evening meal, and nothing in the shape of a sail moves upon the water; come, my boat is here."

Philippa, now fully conscious of her own imprudence, and alarmed at the lateness of the hour, eluded his grasp, and turned her steps rapidly homeward. But her companion soon reached her, and seizing her arm, exclaimed:

"Silly girl! thinkest thou I came hither like some wandering gipsy, to read thy fortune! That were but a bootless errand. I leave not the shore but in thy company,—I have not ventured this risk for nothing."

The Italian spirit of the Catanese maiden was now fully roused; and drawing a small dagger from her bosom, she struck a desperate and effectual blow. The stranger released his hold, and sunk to the ground, insensible, while Philippa fled to the hamlet.

Upon opening the fish which Guiseppe had brought to Philippa, as the first cast of his net, a ring of some value was found within it; and when the young girl returned, all were gathered round the spot, expressing their belief that supernatural agency was at the bottom of this mysterious occur-

rence. When Philippa approached, the crowd drew back, and gazed upon her with awe; while Guiseppe, falling gracefully on one knee, tendered the ring to her acceptance. The maiden started, and those scenes from the book of life rushed across her mind; as the golden circlet pressed her finger, it seemed a step towards the fulfillment of her dreams.

Meantime, a couple of fishermen perceived the body of the stranger; and finding that he stirred not, though they sprinkled his brow with water, and uncovered his bosom to the night breeze, they hastened to the village, and spread the tale of horror. Philippa's cheek was pale, though her voice was firm, and she trembled not when the frightened peasants unfolded their tale. The simple inhabitants, unused to scenes of violence and bloodshed, drew together in a trembling group, and remained as though paralyzed; but ere long the claims of humanity dispelled their fears, and they hastened to the spot. The body was no longer there! They searched beneath the hanging cliffs, but found him not; and on looking for his vessel, they perceived that the boat itself had vanished. Were it not for the crimson stream that wound amid the smooth sand, they would have discredited the tale, or regarded it only as the effect of superstition in their companions; but *that* afforded evidence not to be controverted. A dark fear hung over the little village; and with anxious devotion, they supplied with fresh oil the lamps that burned before the shrine of the Virgin.

But supernatural intervention had very little to do with the disappearance of the wounded man. The violence of the blow, and the subsequent loss of blood, had stunned him for the time; but the exertions of the kind-hearted peasants soon restored him to the use of his senses, and, anxious to escape their inquiries, he regained his feet as soon as possible. It would not sound well to acknowledge being vanquished by a woman; and as whatever sentiments he had previously entertained with respect to Philippa were now absorbed by a deadly hatred, he quickly pushed off from the shore, vowing a deep and lasting revenge.

CHAPTER II.

It was midnight; that dark, awe-inspiring hour, when the beings of another world are supposed to hold their communications with mortal men; that hour which the assassin chooses as his own, and advancing with the cautious, stealthy step of crime, strikes his unconscious victim to the heart; and perchance, from smiling dreams of past hours, and faded hopes never to be recalled, he wakes—in *eternity!*—that hour when the solitary watcher by the couch of pain sits with the pallid hand clasped in hers, and with almost suspended breath, listens in silent agony to the fluttering pulse, smooths the damp hair from the brow, on which stands the sweat of the death-struggle, and counts distinctly each long, deep, never-ending stroke that ushers in his last hour of life! Nay, start not with that sharp, ringing cry, as though the heart had received its death-wound; he "is not dead, but sleepeth"—sleeps to awake in another world, with that love which is thine even in death, ennobled, raised, purified; 'tis not for *thee* to weep. Tears, hot, scalding tears, drops from the heart's warm blood, are hers who takes to her heart an intense, consuming passion; who revels in the slavery, and presses passionate kisses on the heavy, wearing fetters—who makes it a part of her very being, twines the threads of life around the insatiate idol, but to see the warm, passionate glances, the low, soul-thrilling tones, and the smile that can beam *so* but on one—to see these, for which she has bartered her heart's freedom, *another's!* Ay! tears are her rightful heritage; *thou* hast naught to do with them, poor, solitary, friendless as thou art; for *thine* was the name that trembled on his lips with his parting breath—*thine* the hand that received the last faint pressure of undying love—*thine* the breast on which the drooping head was pillowed. Thine in life, thine in death—what more canst thou ask?

It was midnight, but all was calm and quiet; the serene

sunset that preceded it had given place to a sky of more sombre tint, in which a few dark clouds were visible. No sound save the regular breathing of the sleeper broke the stillness of that quiet chamber, with its shaded light, that at midnight casts a faint shadow on surrounding objects, and causes them to assume that mysterious appearance, half real and half ideal, which seems to the excited fancy the embodiment of superstitious terrors. Imagine that a mother, with hand carefully shading the lamp from the eyes of the sleeper, has started from her sleepless couch again to gaze upon her treasure, and assure herself that it is safe. The door is closed—the heavy curtains put noiselessly aside—and bending down low to trace the beloved features in that darkened room, she would press a passionate kiss upon the glowing cheek, and tearing herself once more away, retire to sleep with a lightened heart. But though no mother, with her pure, unselfish love, is there to gaze upon that slumbering face, an invisible power parts the heavy, sweeping curtains, and the vision of beauty is before us! A fair girl in her first, delicate bloom, with long tresses of dark, shining hair, that sweep the soft cheek, and flow wild and dishevelled over her white robe. The mouth smiles sweetly, as though the sleeper were in the midst of some pleasant dream; but see! a brilliant blush mantles even to the brow—ah, telltale! we can guess the purport of those dreams now. Of the eyes nothing is visible but the lids, in hue like those delicate shells that lie where the warm breeze of a tropical clime bears on its wing the sweet breath of clustered flowers, as it comes to toy with the sunlit waves—and the long, fringing lashes that rest so lovingly on the round cheek; but they must be full, dark, and glorious. As she slumbers there, unconscious of aught save her rapturous dreams, but for the changing color it would seem as though some inspired sculptor had carved the beauteous statue, and given the features an appearance of breathing life; so perfect is the curving nostril, the dimpled mouth, and the fair, rounded throat. But hark! she speaks, and the word those rich lips murmur is "Gaetano." What a volume speaks in those softly-breathed syllables! Sleep on, sweet dreamer—sleep on, little deeming that thy vision of love shall end too soon in horror.

The twenty-seventh November 1343 was a night long to

be remembered in Naples. Those fearful prognostications which had been made the subject of jest, and instead of conferring honor on the prophesiers, rendered them objects of ridicule, were doomed to be realized in a terrible and unsuspected manner. Petrarch thus wrote on the subject to his friend, the Cardinal Colonna: "This visitation from Heaven was foretold several days before its occurrence by the bishop of a little neighboring island, who rested his prediction on certain astronomical calculations; but as it rarely happens that prophets penetrate the whole truth of any future event, so he unluckily announced as the completion of the catastrophe, that a terrible earthquake would ensue, by which Naples itself would be destroyed on the 25th of November!" This announcement was received in much the same manner that predictions of the great end are listened to at the present day. The multitude scoffed at the idea; though some few there were, who, struck with horror, began to make preparations for their approaching end—and neglecting all worldly concerns, prostrated themselves before the altars and shrines, and spent the time in prayers and lamentations.

As the dreaded moment drew near, the number of supplicants increased; even those who had laughed at the prediction "repented at the eleventh hour," overcome with fear and trembling. The churches were filled; priests in their robes of office, who, calm and composed, with gaze fixed *beyond* the coming horrors, re-assured the trembling multitude—crowds of worshipping devotees, with all thoughts swallowed up in the terrible crisis—those whose lives had been passed amid scenes of crime, and who now stood in those sacred aisles perchance for the first time—all were there.

But many as the night drew on retired to rest with minds as peaceful and dreams as sweet as though no catastrophe were at hand; the sky showed no signs of it; though not perfectly clear, there was naught that could betoken that fearful dividing of the earth which had been predicted—those terrible chasms that seemed opened for the purpose of swallowing up human life. Many, who ere morning were inhabitants of another world, had gazed admiringly on their last sunset—beautiful, sublime, even in that land where each day's sun sinks lovingly to rest, pillowed on golden clouds, and curtained with purple, and azure.

The beautiful maiden who sleeps there so unconsciously is Isoldina, the foster-sister of Andreas; the building, though connected with the Castel-Novo, is one of those used for the dependants about the palace, and situated on the shores of the bay. The night wears on; all thoughts of danger are forgotten in sleep, or perchance in revelling; by some in that burning poison which maddens the brain, and dances wildly through the scorching veins—their stupefied senses cannot awake to the oft-repeated tale, till the fearful, maddening reality rouses them to danger and—despair! Despair, because the precious moments which might have placed them beyond the advancing doom, are gone, never to be recalled—a few more drops added to the ocean of Time, to *them* pearls, precious pearls which they have madly cast away.

"Hark! heard you not that rumbling sound?—By the blessed Virgin and all the holy Saints, 'tis the earthquake! Awake! Awake, I say, or we shall all be swallowed up!"

"Peace, fool! Thou hast spoiled with thy silly prating the best dream I ever had. Truly, the wise bishop with his wonderful tales hath turned thy brain—not over strong at any time. The *earthquake!* 'Twas the echo of ringing hoofs that struck upon thine ear, or else an exaggerated sound of thy wandering fancy. Keep thy dreams till morning—they will not *lessen* in the interval, I fancy, and I care not to hear them now. The *earthquake!* the man is surely demented."

But scarcely were the words uttered ere the same sound, still louder and more fearful, came booming through the air; and with shaking limbs, and faces white with terror, the two men sprang hastily from their couches, and stood gazing into each other's eyes, incapable of speech or movement. But another terrible rumbling, in which the floor shook beneath their feet, roused them to their senses; and rushing to the window, they beheld the waters of the once tranquil bay lashing and foaming in fury, while a terrible darkness was spread over the scene, save where forked tongues of lightning shewed the horror and devastation around. With some scarcely yet awakened—others calling wildly on their patron saints—and all, almost incapacitated from terror, the trembling inmates fled from the shaking tenement.

At the Castel Novo all was terror and dismay. The voices of the multitude below were distinctly heard, and every

moment the tale increased in horror. The young queen, more calm in that fearful hour than those around her, retired to her oratory, and though the white lips moved in prayer, seemed like some chiselled statue thus represented in kneeling attitude.

The words of the poet will better explain the state of things without: "The oldest seamen declared that the like was never witnessed. In the midst of the port were seen an infinite number of poor wretches scattered about on the sea, and struggling to regain the shore, who, by the violence and fury of the waves, were battered about till they looked like so many eggs dashed to pieces on the beach. The whole space was filled with drowned and half-drowned bodies; some with their skulls fractured, others with broken arms or legs, others with the bowels gushing out; and the screams of men and women who lived near the beach, were no less terrific than the war of the elements. The very sands on which the day before you walked in ease and safety, were become more dangerous than the Faro of Messina, or the whirlpool of Charybdis. A thousand or more of the Neapolitan nobility came to the shore on horseback, as if to solemnize the funeral obsequies of their country; and when I found myself among them I began to be of better cheer, seeing that if I were doomed to perish, I should at least die with the honor of knighthood. Soon the dreadful rumor came to our ears, that the ground on which we trod had been undermined by the sea, and was beginning to open. We fled precipitately and saved ourselves; but the spectacle we then beheld was the most terrible ever witnessed by mortal eye; the heavens so commingled! the sea so implacably turbulent! the waves mountain high, and in color neither black nor blue, as in ordinary tempests, but perfectly white, like hills of snow, rolling over the whole expanse from Capri to Naples."

The frightened, trembling group who crouched together within the walls of the Castel Novo drew back, and for the moment, even the noise of the conflicting elements and the cries of the dying were forgotten, as they gazed upon that picture of human agony, and heard those sounds of anguish. It was the voice of a mother calling for her child! With hair wildly streaming to the wind, and eyes glaring in the first stage of madness, Isolda, the king's nurse, rushed from

her apartment, and like a frightful vision scattering all before her, shrieked again and again:

"Isoldina! Isoldina! My child! My child!" Those frenzied accents rose high above the din, and all were awed by the mother's grief.

"Cold, pitiless wretches! will none of ye rescue her? Must she perish in her youth and beauty, be swallowed up in the raging flood, with none to lend a helping hand? Are ye human? Have ye human hearts in your bosoms, or are ye not rather arch fiends, that triumph and exult in my misery?"

Terrified at the sight of that frenzied woman, and forgetting for the time their own sorrows and all that was at stake, they sought to soothe and comfort her.

"She may yet be saved," said one; "there are many others in the same building, and they will hardly fly, and leave her, the young and beautiful, to so horrible a death."

"*May* be saved!" exclaimed Isolda, turning fiercely upon the speaker; "Do you try to satisfy a mother in terror for her child, with the cold, heartless word *may-be?* Would that soothe the throbbings of your own hearts? *No!* Her youth and beauty have not excited a pitying feeling in any of *you*, and why should they in others? Do ye expect them to be more merciful than yourselves? But enough—ye will not help me, and alone will I attempt the rescue of my child, or perish! May the Virgin aid me!"

"Isolda! you are crazed!" screamed her terrified companions, as they strove to detain her.

"Mad—raving!" she replied, while her eyes glared fearfully; "Do not hold me, or I shall do ye mischief!"

As the caged lioness bursts the bonds that would confine her, so did the frenzied mother set at naught the strength of that wondering crowd, and rushing towards the entrance, stopped not till she had gained the seashore. She heard not a voice of anxiety and distress that cried after her: "I will rescue her! I will save her! Wait but a moment!"

"Art thou too crazed, Gaetano?" said they, "rash boy! Wilt thou deliver thyself up to certain death for the sake of this Hungarian maiden? Look at the fury of those elements, and then ask thyself if there is any chance of escape? Thy folly will avail thee not, for ere now the crazy building is

swallowed up by the sea, and the lodgers deserted it. As for those who fled not, heaven be merciful to their souls!"

Far from soothing, these remonstrances seemed to drive the youth distracted. "Isoldina!" he muttered between his clenched teeth; then seizing an old porter by the arm, he drew him aside, and whispered hurriedly: "Take this jewelled ring—ask of me anything, all that I have, and it shall be thine; only seize a rope anywhere—search! for a life depends upon it, and follow me quickly. I go to rescue Isoldina! Dolt! Idiot! Stand not there! thy folly drives me to distraction!"

The old man did indeed stand gazing in surprise upon Gaetano, who, quite as excited as Isolda herself, seemed lashed into ungovernable fury by his conduct. "How much will thy gaping help me, or soothe the tempest, thinkest thou? Here is my purse; it is filled with gold, old man—may it but unlock thy tongue, and set thy limbs in motion!"

His companion caught the arm of Gaetano as soon as he found words to reply: "And so, for the sake of the Hungarian's pretty face, and well-turned ankle, you are willing to peril your life, eh, master squire? 'Tis a wild scheme enough, but still wilder to expect a man in the perfect use of his senses to add to the number of fools. No, no, Master Gaetano, if you go, it will be alone, or I much belie the present company."

"You do indeed belie them, good Paoli—and yourself no less. Could you know that a fellow-mortal was at this moment in peril of her life, dying perchance—and when one effort of yours would save her, not be willing to make that effort? You could not—you *can* not! so come, come with me—I feel, I *know* that we shall rescue her!"

The old man relented; and wondering at himself for doing so, he followed his young guide to the sea-shore.

In the mean time the young girl still slept on; the lamp cast a faint but steady light around the chamber, and unheeding the scene of horror without, or the cries and exclamations of the lodgers within—with cheek pillowed upon her hand, and the long hair floating in dark drapery about her, the maiden slept. How lovely is sleep! the sleep of the young and beautiful, when the gentle breathing just fans the stray tress that rests so lovingly upon the cheek, and the

mouth is curved with that beautiful smile that tells of angel-wanderings. It is beautiful too in childhood, when the velvet cheek is flushed with a rich, warm hue where the tiny hand has pressed it, and the little form lies there so unconscious in its slumber. And beautiful, thrice beautiful, is the sleep of age! With the grey locks clustering about the high pale brow, hands meekly folded upon the bosom, and features stern, yet lovely in their calm repose: it is an earnest of the sleep which is to come—the long, never-ending sleep; and as we gaze upon such, we feel that this is the portrait of death, even as a vision bears semblance to the reality.

In her slumber bright-hued dreams came thronging around her path. She dreamed that her mother had at last overcome her prejudices, and caring no longer for the distinctions between Italians and Hungarians, resigned her to the husband of her choice. As he took her hand in his, he bent down close and whispered: "Isoldina!" in a low, sweet, thrilling tone that seemed to echo again and again, musical as at first. But still the sound continued; and grew louder, louder, louder, until it seemed a fearful shriek. With a startled cry the young girl awoke, and gazed wildly around the shaking chamber, as strange unearthly sounds fell upon her ear. Was she dreaming still, or had she in her sleep been transported into the midst of some wild and fearful scene? No, the little room was still the same; every article of furniture was there, even to the cross of fragrant wood curiously carved, which she had placed by her bedside.

But that dreadful shriek as of some one in mortal agony still continued; and as the heart-rending cry of "Isoldina!" again burst forth, she recognized her mother's voice! The prophecy! the terrible prophecy that she had scorned! Isoldina tottered to the window, with her white night-robe floating loosely around her, and the beautiful eyes wide open with terror as the fitful light revealed to her the scene below. There were dark masses lying about upon the sand; some in irregular piles, and others thrown singly upon the shore, which her shuddering and sickened gaze told her could only be dead mangled bodies—there were chests, tables, ropes, and all the et ceteras of shipwrecked vessels—but the figure which riveted her eyes was that of a woman who with out-

stretched arms, wildly called for aid, and shrieked "Isoldina! Isoldina!"

As the white, spirit-like form of her daughter appeared, showing faintly forth amid the darkness at each glare of lightning, the unhappy mother seemed wrought into a state of frenzy. The young girl stood calm, motionless, composed; with the cross tightly pressed to her bosom, and eyes upraised in silent devotion. It was a beautiful, though fearful picture, with its light and shade; the dark, tempestuous night, with its darkness rendered still deeper by contrast with the floods of liquid fire that poured from the troubled skies—the once calm, smiling bay with its angry waves foaming high around the tottering tenement—while fair and pure amid the unearthly scene stood that devoted maiden, all other thoughts banished from the mind of one just ready for an eternal flight. Again the old building was fearfully agitated, and with a terrible shriek, Isolda exclaimed "Gone! gone forever!"

When the first terrible shock had subsided, the agonized mother tremblingly withdrew her hands, expecting to behold the timbers of a crushed and scattered house, and at her feet the mangled corpse of her daughter. But no! there still stands the gloomy building, and like an angel of light gleam forth the pale features of the maiden. It was still some comfort to the wretched Isolda to know that, although the next returning shock would probably bear her from her sight, still she was not gone yet—not *yet!* At this moment her gaze fell upon the Italian youth, who, followed by the old porter, well laden with rope, was hastening with rapid strides to the spot.

"Save her! save her, Gaetano!" she cried; "Restore her to my arms—let me but gaze upon her features once more, and she is yours! you will not let her perish! Here amid this fearful scene, I swear by our holy Lady and all the blessed Saints, she shall be yours, and yours only till death! Save her! save her!"

The heart of the lover beat high; long had the Hungarian mother repulsed his hopes, and scorned his love—but now, 'she should be his, his only till death!' He glanced towards Isoldina, who now—now that the object of her dearest feelings stood there to remind her of what life *might* be, felt that indescribable clinging to it—that unwillingness to give

up hope even when hope has fled—and stretched forth her arms imploringly to her lover. That silent appeal roused the youth to high and desperate daring; and hastily seizing the rope, he exclaimed: "I will save thee, Isoldina, or together we perish!"

CHAPTER III.

LIKE one who, when all is lost, and everything wears the dark, dismal aspect of despair, has the cup of happiness again proffered to his parched lips, did the wretched Isolda hail this brightening gleam. "O, haste! haste!" she cried in all the frenzy of renewed hope, "Haste, or she will be lost, swept away forever!"

Gaetano needed not to be goaded on to exertion, with that pale, statue-like countenance, shining forth amid the darkness, and the lovely arms stretched out to implore his aid; in silent emotion he bound one end of the rope about his waist, and handing the other extremity to Isolda and the porter, he grasped a heavy staff to keep off the falling timbers, and prepared to descend from the wall. With one look to the boiling surge below, and a passionate glance at Isoldina, whose mute imploring gestures strengthened his purpose, he breathed a hurried prayer, and sprang into the waves.

There was a smothered silence among the little band; no sound arose save that of the angry waves, and the pealing thunder, while the lightning showed their faces, pale and breathless—all was cast on that one effort. The tempest redoubled its violence, and a huge wave dashed at their feet a heavy, motionless mass. At the same moment a shriek from Isoldina rang through the air; and with apprehensions wrought up for the worst, the two who still remained upon the wall seized the body—the rope was around the waist—the lightning revealed the pale features of Gaetano, bruised, crushed, senseless!

"He is dead!" shrieked the disappointed mother, "*Dead!* and Isoldina is lost forever! My child! my child!"

"He is not yet dead," replied the porter, after a hurried glance, "only bruised against the rocks. The maiden is still safe, but no time is to be lost—help me to chafe his hands, and he will recover."

Life—happiness—all hung upon that frail thread; and

with desperate strength, Isolda rubbed the cold limbs, until at length the returning blood coursed through the veins.

"Gaetano!" screamed the wretched mother, as the youth languidly raised his eyes to the anxious countenances bending over him, "Gaetano! are you mad? Isoldina will be lost, lost forever! Again I repeat, save her and she is yours!"

As the words rang in his ears, he started to regain his feet, but weakness overpowered him. He had been fearfully bruised.

"Rash fool!" muttered the old porter, as he marked the pallid hue of his countenance, "I warned him against perilling his life for these Hungarian women; no good can come of it—we shall all die together. Now, had it been for our fair young queen, the case were different—had I died a thousand deaths, I would have saved *her!* But the Hungarians, not satisfied with taking all our worldly substance from us, must even ask our lives too! Had I *my* way, they should not long trouble the kingdom!"

But the young Italian's will soon conquered his weakness; faint and exhausted as he felt himself to be, he tightened the cord around his waist, and a second time braved the raging flood. But again and again the remorseless waves threw him back violently against the rocks; and despair almost banished every gleam of hope.

"Give up this useless attempt, I pray you," said the porter, mournfully, "and let us hasten from the spot while yet we may. I care not to see so brave a youth killed before my eyes—for you were ever civil and well-spoken, master Gaetano; a thing which cannot be said of many of the smart young squires. Come, return with me."

"Return!" exclaimed Isolda, "Monster! would you have him return, and leave my child to perish? Do not point to his wounds," she continued wildly, "I can see naught but Isoldina—hear nothing but her shrieks! Can you, Gaetano, hear those cries unmoved?"

With a strong effort he again rose to his feet and exclaimed, while a glow of enthusiasm lit up his pale features:

"Again will I venture into the stormy waves, and I return with Isoldina, or return not at all. I shall not survive a fourth bruising against the rocks. Hand me my staff, and tighten the rope about my waist."

Boldly grasping the pole, he kept off the pieces of timber and casks that threatened to crush him, and steadfastly bore onwards towards the falling building. He gained it, and disappeared; but soon a loud scream of joy burst from the mother, as he appeared, with the terrified Isoldina in his arms. They drew in the cord with all the energy of hope, and soon mother and child were locked in a tearful embrace. Supporting the wounded Gaetano, who was hardly able to walk, they hastened from the scene of their horror and despair, and soon gained the walls of the Castel Novo. Scarcely were they beyond the danger, ere a tremendous crash struck upon their ears; and turning to ascertain the cause, they beheld the wall on which they had stood crumbling to pieces, and the house swallowed up by the flood—not a trace remained. With true and heartfelt devotion, the little party fell upon their knees, and rendered thanks to Heaven for their miraculous preservation.

The beams of the morning sun fell upon a group too happy in themselves, to think of the scene without. A youth, with dark, inspired eye, disordered locks, and features lit up with hope and happiness, although his soiled and torn attire, on which stains of blood were distinctly visible, spoke of some recent and serious conflict, sat with his hand locked in that of a beautiful girl, whose eyes were bent upon him with the tenderest solicitude. At her side was a woman in the prime of life, who continually pressed the maiden to her bosom—gazing upon her long and earnestly, as if to assure herself that the features were indeed those of her child. Then turning to the youth, she exclaimed:

"She is thine, Gaetano! To thee a mother resigns her treasure—the idol of her life! Nobly hast thou won her—but oh! may thy love be ever the same! Chill her not by coldness and indifference!"

"Isoldina!" he whispered.

The young girl started; they were the same low, thrilling tones, that had broken upon her ear in that bright dream; but now no fearful catastrophe would follow a few short moments of bliss—this was real, breathing, earnest.

"Isoldina! mine—mine till death! The midnight struggle is more than repaid—again would I dare it for so rich a boon—*thy love!*"

The color mantled deeper in her cheeks, and the sweet, downcast eyes, glowed with a rich, warm light. But as her glance rested for a moment on her lover, she was alarmed at the sudden paleness that overspread his countenance.

"Thou art hurt, Gaetano!" she exclaimed. "In saving a worthless life, thou hast indeed sacrificed thine own! Thinkest thou, cruel one, that I can live on through a long void of weary years, when my existence is robbed of its sunshine? I thank thee not for the boon of life—'twas too dearly purchased."

Isolda hastened to the sufferer; and soon his eyes unclosed; and a faint, returning color rose in his cheeks, under her prompt and efficient remedies. The brave youth had indeed been severely bruised, though not dangerously.

"'Tis nothing," he murmured, "nothing but a sudden faintness, dear one; and again and again would I go through with all that I have suffered for *thy* sake, Isoldina! Will not men search long and diligently for a jewel of great price? Endure hardship, fatigue, and suffering to win it? *Thou* art my jewel, dear one. Had the foaming waves been flames of fire, the sight of thy pale, imploring countenance, Isoldina, would have led me on, till life itself had become extinct. O! the uncertain agony of that moment, when, with the booming thunder and roaring waves mingling in my ears—the old building tottering to its very foundation—and that low, wailing cry, distinct even amid the tempest, I plunged for the last time into the dark and turbid waters!"

"Do not call up the fearful scene," said the young girl shuddering; adding with a faint smile: "We are happy in the Present—why then dwell on the Past? and that so terrible a one!"

"Look," observed Isolda, "at yonder train; they go to visit the churches of the Virgin. Our holy Lady be praised, and thanked for our deliverance!"

The young Italian suddenly put back the cross which he had reverently raised to his lips, and exclaiming: "The queen!" knelt down humbly and respectfully until they had passed. It was indeed a touching sight, that long train of females; many of them Italy's youngest and brightest daughters, headed by the fair girl scarcely emerged from childhood, on whose yet unwritten brow rested the crown of Naples.

They bore flowers, the offering of the young and innocent, the pure in heart—bright jewels of the Earth. The royal feet were bare, and exposed to the rough pavement, as if in penance for some heavy crime—while the fair head had no other covering than the long shining tresses of golden hair. On passed the devotees; and while the incense of their offerings ascended to the skies, they receded farther and farther from sight, until their forms became lost in the distance.

Whether Isolda disliked the reverence shown by Gaetano towards the young Italian queen, or repented of her midnight vow was not apparent; but no sooner had the train passed than she turned from the window, and bending a glance of displeasure on the kneeling youth, sharply exclaimed: "It were better, methinks, Master Gaetano, to treat our holy Lady with more respect, and not start suddenly from devotion to gaze so ardently on this girl-queen. Isoldina will yet have trouble to hold this fickle heart of thine!"

The blood rushed to the brow of the youth as he replied to this unlooked-for accusation: "Nay, mother, I know not what these words of thine may mean; I meant no disrespect to our holy Lady, but the sight of the young queen, attired as though to do penance for sins which perchance never even flashed across her pure mind, may be deemed a pardonable excuse for momentary forgetfulness in a warm-blooded Italian."

"Aye," muttered the nurse to herself, "a rash hot-headed race they are too! Would that any other than one of this ireful nation had performed last night's deed, and won Isoldina!"

The words that had passed between them were few, but they left a dim foreboding in the mind of the lover, and as his eye met hers, he saw that the shadow had fallen on Isoldina. A sudden cloud had passed across their track of sunshine, and left its darkness in their spirits.

The shore presented a horrible and sickening appearance; the mangled bodies of the dead were strewn about in all directions, and mingled with the masts and timbers of the shipwrecked vessels—while as if in mockery, rich silks and velvets from the overladen bales were spread around upon the dead. Crowds were hurrying to the spot, to recover if possible the bodies of relations who had been expected home in

the vessels—little deeming to meet them in this fearful manner. A poor insane mother, whose senses had departed with the last night's horrors, came to search for her boy. She was a poor widow, and the youth in question had a short time before gone to sea, in the full expectation of realizing countless riches.

"Speak to me, Giovanni—do you not hear me calling! Speak, caro mio! Not thus was he wont to treat his poor mother, but his riches have turned his brain—would that I had not let him go to sea! Where is he? I cannot find him!"

Thus the poor creature talked, and muttered; calling on Giovanni, until some seamen pointed out to her a mangled body.

"*That* my boy!" she exclaimed with a fearful laugh. "That crushed, shapeless thing! No, No! Giovanni had fair curling hair, and a bright color on his cheek—that is not *my* son!"

But although pitying the sorrow of the poor mother, they knew it was useless to conceal the truth; and at length by indubitable proofs, she recognized the boy. But the revulsion of feeling was too great; with a sharp wailing cry, and a strength that eluded their efforts to detain her, she sprang into the sea, and the foaming waves closed over her.

CHAPTER IV.

Eve in beautiful Naples! Eve, with its sad, yet sweet and refreshing memories of absent and departed ones; when the face of one we fondly loved seems to look down upon us from the clouds, and a soft familiar hand is locked in our own. The sweet but transient bliss of that twilight vision! The crowds of old and dear remembrances that come thronging back along the dark vista of past years—the scenes, the thoughts, the passions that moved us then, roused into a second being by that seraph countenance! O memory! thy magic wand can take the wrinkles from the brow of age, restore the eye's lost fire, and bring back the joyous heart, the throbbing pulse, and quick bounding step of boyhood! It can do all this, but yet is the gaze into the enchanted mirror one of unalloyed happiness? No! the smile is often a bitter one, as the mind retraces past scenes, even scenes of joy—for they can *not* come fresh and fair to the eye—the dust of time will cling about them, and mar their brightest colors; or perchance the very contrast with what *was* and *is* plants a thorn within the bosom. Truly, the heart knoweth its own bitterness!

It was eve, with its fair, silvery lines, and scarcely perceptible touches of that darkness which at midnight enwraps our souls like a funeral pall. O! a hushed and silent sweetness is linked with thee, eve! An invisible charm that glides upon our senses, and bears us from thoughts of earth to something far more bright and beautiful! It was eve; with here and there a pale, silver star, that timidly crept forth from its couch of rest, and trembled to see its first faint beams reflected far below on the breast of the transparent waves, that sang on in gladness beneath the cheering light. And the song of the gliding waves was carried by echo to the depths below, where the sea nymphs, in their coral caves, took up the symphony ere its last notes died away; and while their busy fingers twined wreaths of the many-colored sea-weed, strains of low-toned melody rose

upon the bosom of the deep. It was eve, when the voice of the sighing wind dies away in low whispers, as it plays amid the perfumed orange groves, and scatters heaps of scented blossoms abroad upon the breeze. And the gentle flowers hung down their heads, and wept; for the sun had sunk to rest behind the distant hills, and came no more to light their hearts with his brilliant beams. But then the angel of night closed their weeping eyes, while the pearly tears nestled together in their bosoms in one rich drop, that sparkled like a brilliant diamond, when the rays of the returning sun shone upon it.

The bay of Naples lay slumbering in the soft moonlight; while ever and anon a distant sail broke the line where sea and sky seemed to mingle together. Across its glossy bosom shot the well-laden gondolas, whence issued the rich voices of Italia's dark-eyed daughters, mingling together in some strain of passionate melody. The clear expanse of waters shining below, and the bright, unclouded vault above —with the picturesque island of Capri gleaming out upon the bosom of the deep, like a solitary spot of verdure in a lone desert—and in the distance the fiery peak of Vesuvius, marring like some evil spirit the beauty of the scene—presented a picture at once lovely and startling in its grandeur. O land of love and beauty! what description can do thee justice? Clime of the high and talented, of the sculptor, painter, and poet—where the very air breathes passion, and the sunlight glow on tree and flower, the ruined cloister's grandeur, with its rich, quaint carving, chaste columns, and sombre light, as it falls through stained windows into the dim old aisles—even the faded relics of the past inspire the pencil and the glowing pen! A bright, glorious confusion of sunny skies, scenes that earth has stolen from Paradise, and made her own; soft, dark, bewildering eyes, whose depths mirror forth each thought, each feeling and emotion; smiles bright as the beams of its gorgeous sun, and yet soft and sweet as the subdued beauty of its twilight hour; high and daring deeds, the themes of song; and as the shadow to this brilliant light, dim, indistinct visions of the dark and fearful, all are mingled together.

There was once a picture where all was beautiful and lovely; the softest tints were brought to paint the sky and

sea, that like a sheet of crystal slept beneath the sunlight. Like the gardens of fabled lore, the trees bore the most delicious fruit to tempt the senses, and the flowers clustered in bright, variegated masses. But on the other side of the painting was the same scene, where the skies, before so fair and smiling, hung in heavy clouds, from which darted angry tongues of flame—the clear, crystal waters were lost in a scowling tempest—a fearful change had passed over all. Alas! Italy, thus it is with thee. A hidden poison often lingers in the perfumed breeze, that breaks forth at length in the loathsome pestilence; and the fearful rumbling of those hidden fires, destroys the beauty of which nature is so lavish. It is like some fair, deceitful face, in whose smiling features we care not to trace the lines of passion beneath.

On sped each well-laden bark, bearing over the sleeping waters the beautiful and gay; while now and then a voice of peculiar sweetness warbled forth a plaintive air. Music on the waves! The low, passionate strains rising and falling upon the silent air, while the bright-eyed stars seemed creeping forth to listen. But the tones were not always those of a joyous heart, that *must* give vent to its bursting gladness; there were some there whose songs were almost a mockery, when the ever ready tears must be pressed back to their source. There were those who bartered the rich gift of song for money to aid the suffering ones at home; and when a gondola passed slowly on, whence came sad sweet strains that told the story of a broken heart, the contributions were freely given to prolong those exquisite strains.

As a bark shot quickly past whose occupants were closely muffled in cloaks, the gondolier displayed by accident a hand whose small and even delicate proportions formed a strange contrast to its masculine employment. At that moment they passed a gaily ornamented gondola, whose occupants examined them most attentively.

"Here is some mystery," remarked one of the young nobles, "the inmates of yonder bark are not what they appear. When so much disturbance reigns at court there may be some foul plot brewing. I hope 'tis no work of the scheming Hungarians!"

"Thou art a good-natured fool, for thy pains, Bernardino," replied one of his companions with a laugh. "Seest thou not,

man, that the occupants of yonder boat are females? and pretty ones too I'll warrant! Santa Maria! such a well-turned hand has not refreshed my vision these two months. Conspiracies indeed! No worse conspiracies, Sir Vigilant, than a short absence from the watchful eyes of father, or duenna, to steal a meeting with some disconsolate lover. A romantic scheme truly! I vote that we follow these retreating amazons, and see whither they land—perchance at the entrance of the Fieschi Palace."

This proposal was unanimously assented to; and not perceiving the distress which their bold conduct occasioned, the young nobles rapidly advanced upon the flying gondola.

On perceiving that they were followed, the oar had almost dropped from the hand of the terrified gondolier; a slender, girlish looking female crouched down in an opposite corner, as though fearful of attracting attention; while the third, and remaining occupant, a woman of commanding figure, stepped forward, and whispered in the ear of the rower:

"Remember, Sancha, 'tis for life or death—one last effort for the *queen!* Should we be discovered, our punishment eternal disgrace, if nothing worse; be brave, girl, and show thyself true to the queen—she hath been ever true to us."

Thus adjured, the fair gondolier put forward her whole strength; but her powerless hand refused to hold the oar, and dropping down within the boat, she murmured: "I cannot! I cannot! See how fast they gain upon us—they are almost at our side!"

With a muttered expression of impatience, she who had first spoken hastily seized the oar, and motioned the girl to a seat beside the queen, who buried her face in her bosom, and burst into tears.

"O, haste, good Philippa!" she cried in a suppressed voice, "Haste! for see they gain upon us quickly!"

"Now beshrew me!" murmured Philippa, "did the graceless knaves but know that they put our fair Joanna in peril of her life, the prow of their boat would soon be turned from us. And why should they not know? The secret would be safe with them, safer than 'tis likely to be now; for scamps though they be, thus to persecute helpless women, not a soul in this capital of Naples, always saving and excepting Father Roberts, and his diabolical crew of Hungarians, not a soul

but would protect his gentle and sweet tempered queen with the last drop of his blood! Gracious lady," continued Philippa as she bent towards her mistress, "see, they are almost at our side! Our feeble strength can do little against their perseverance; but I will tell them that it is the *queen* who throws herself upon their protection—they will not dare abuse it."

"Philippa," replied Joanna, while her sweet countenance assumed a stern expression, and her figure rose from its recumbent position, "Philippa, I, thy sovereign, forbid it. They would see Joanna but as the party in a most unqueenly act; and though they offered no insult to the crown, would cease to respect her. At evening, in disguise, and with no protection but two faithful women, the queen can appear with but little dignity, ignorant as they are, and must be, of the motive that prompted this suspicious act. They would think it some masquerading folly, little befitting the sovereign of Naples—and perchance even blush for her childish levity. No, Philippa, I would not sink even in their estimation."

The faithful Philippa sighed as she perceived from the queen's decided manner that remonstrance would have no effect; and silently plying the oar, she awaited the result.

"By the Saints! but they fight it bravely!" remarked their pursuers. "Yonder rower will give us trouble yet, by the way in which she pushes along the boat. It may be well worth our pains to follow them; perchance the scions of more than one noble family will beg our secresy upon their evening flitting. What sayest thou, Ludovico? The bright eyes of the Lady Giuliva may reward a close search beneath yonder muffling hoods."

"I wish," replied the perturbed youth, "that these meddling projects may receive from the *heads* of noble families, the punishment they justly merit. A Fieschi, Amadoni, or Carelli is not apt to let such insults pass by."

"O, never fear, good master Ludovico!" was the rejoinder; then murmuring in an under tone: "That allusion to the Lady Giuliva has roused his ire," they continued: "Signor Bernardino insists that a dark conspiracy is concealed beneath those thick cloaks; just fancy the honors that will pour upon us for the discovery! Truly our poor heads are turned with the very thought!"

The queen, breathless with fear and shame, watched with anxiety the progress of the pursuing boat. Now a ray of hope returned as their gondola shot ahead; but it was speedily dispelled, for their pursuers gained upon them at a fearful rate. Joanna strained her eyes towards the towers of the Castel Novo which appeared in the distance, while the young and beautiful Countess Terlizi sunk down beside her, scarcely less frightened than herself.

At length the boat neared the Castel, but the gondolas were side by side! One of their pursuers was about to fling his arm round the trembling form of Joanna, when Philippa, rendered desperate by the meditated insult, raised the robe which had fallen over her lovely face—the moonlight rendering the pale but beautiful features quite distinct. The young nobles were paralyzed with astonishment; shame, surprise, and admiration followed each other in rapid succession. But when the melting tones of Joanna's voice fell upon their ears, they threw themselves at her feet, and he who had farthest transgressed the bounds of respect, unsheathed his jewelled sword, and presented it to the queen on bended knee.

"Take it, lady," said he, "take it, and strike to the heart of a miscreant who is no longer fit to live. I have approached the queen with disrespect; strike, and fear not—why should you waver?"

"Nay," replied Joanna, as she returned the sword, "I freely forgive the insult offered to the *queen*, for that was unpremeditated; but I cannot so easily forget the insult thou hast offered to the *woman*. I fear me, had I been but a simple maiden, I had not escaped so easily."

"I warrant me not," said Philippa, audibly, "I warrant me not, or I greatly mistake the faces of the gallants before me. Surely I have seen them about the court."

"Nay, good Philippa," replied one who stood near, "nay," he continued, as he drew her aside, "all faces are so much alike, that thou shouldst not be too certain. Surely thy face is not one that can easily be forgotten—time hath robbed it of none of its beauties, and yet I do not remember to have seen thee before."

"Now out upon thee for a lying braggart!" said Philippa, playfully. "How knewest thou my name, being so ignorant

of my features? But I have seen *thee* before, and I know thy name too, right well. It is—"

Here a hand was placed quickly over her mouth before the dreaded words could escape; and the young noble exclaimed:

"Holy mother! My good lady, but thou callest out names as boldly as though thou hadst never been brought up in the atmosphere of a court. I have known a man lose his life for a less offence than that—ay, and a woman too! Never trouble thy wits for the matter of my name, fair countess; 'tis sufficient that I am acquainted with thine. No danger of our forgetting each other when next we meet, after this careful inspection of features by moonlight; my investigation," he continued, "shows me the face of a beautiful woman—glorious, superb as the moon above our heads; now for thine, Philippa—what doth thine reveal to thee?"

These words were accompanied by a more careful adjustment of the rich cloak, an arrangement of stray locks, and a complacent vanity, which not even the force of circumstances could subdue.

"Away! thou paragon of conceit!" returned Philippa; "away! and trouble me no more with thy silly thoughts."

"I go, bright lady," replied the young noble laughingly, "but not until thou hast promised not to reveal my name to the queen. It can matter thee not to bring a fellow mortal into trouble; and I am so heartily ashamed of the business, that I promise not to engage in a like adventure."

"I rejoice to see," said Philippa, "that even a small share of shame is left thee, but I have a wish to expose thee for having given us so much trouble. My hands are stiff with plying the oar, and the queen almost frightened to death!"

"But what gave rise to this masquerading scene?" returned the offender: "How were we, stupid as we are, to recognize majesty in a cloak of double thickness? And surely in one of thy occupation, fair gondolier, none could perceive the noble bearing of her highness, the Countess of Montoire."

The eyes of Philippa flashed indignantly, as these words reflected some blame on the queen; and turning to her companion, she exclaimed: "It matters not the cause, sir Count, that placed us in the hands of riotous nobles, without shame

or respect; suffice it to say, 'twas no 'masquerading folly,' —and the fair fame of the young queen is as spotless now, as though she had never left the halls of her fathers."

"Now thou doest me wrong!" returned the cavalier, as a crimson flush mounted to his brow; "and wert thou but a man," he continued, as his hand grasped the hilt of his sword, "I would soon make thee feel it! Our weapons are ever ready to fly from their scabbards in the cause of the fair Joanna, and the last drop of our hearts' blood would avenge a wrong done her!"

Philippa's anger was appeased as she perceived the distress of the young noble, and she replied soothingly:

"I believe thee—I believe thee indeed, fair sir; but let the queen's honor be no less sacred with thee than her rights. The latter, if taken, can with force of arms be restored—the former, never. The cause that brought us hither cannot be revealed; but rest assured 'twas not one unbefitting the dignity of thy sovereign."

"I stir not hence," said her companion gaily, "till thou hast made the required promise. Consider, dear lady, the paternosters and ave marias thou wilt have to repeat, before easing thy conscience from the terrible sin of leaving a fellow mortal exposed to all the inconveniences of a sea-beach airing for life; my ghost shall certainly haunt thee."

Philippa, tired of his pertinacity, at length gave the required promise; and then turned to join the queen, who was moving towards the Castel Novo.

"When you look upon this ring," said Joanna to the abashed young noble at her feet, "remember the words of the queen; and oh! may they be the means of deterring you from any act of folly, or of crime."

He pressed his lips reverently to the hem of her garment; and then rising to his feet, stood with folded arms, till the queen and her attendants were lost to view among the angles of the Castle. Silently the party resumed their oars, and plied their way homeward.

That day Joanna received a secret message that her sister Maria, whom the Duke of Durazzo had carried off and married a short time before, wished to see her again, and appointed an interview in a retired spot, not far from Naples, but approachable only by water. The princess Maria had

been the promised bride of Louis of Hungary, the brother of Andreas; but the Duke of Durazzo falling in love with her charms, had secretly carried her off; not without a faint hope of his thereby becoming the husband of the future queen of Naples. The Neapolitans were enraged at this bold proceeding, and the Duke and Duchess wisely absented themselves from court. It was only in secret, and by stealth, that Joanna could obtain a glimpse of her sister; and attended by the faithful Philippa, and her granddaughter, she undertook the perilous journey. She had clasped her in her arms once more—had felt her warm tears on her face—and heard from her repeated assurances of her happiness. But a few moments only did she dare to linger, ere the deepening twilight warned her to return to the palace, before her absence should be noticed. Returning home, they were stopped thus unexpectedly; and it was with a beating heart that Joanna entered the Castle.

CHAPTER V.

ANDREAS, the young husband of the girlish queen, was seated in a small cabinet, alternately listening and replying to the remarks of his tutor, the Fra Roberto, or Father Robert. A beautifully carved table before them was thickly strewn with papers, and manuscripts bound in vellum; and the young king sat with his head resting upon his hand, while an expression of impatience now and then crossed his countenance, as though he were weary of the conference. Not being able to concentrate his mind upon any one point of business that presented no allurements to his wandering fancy, his restless movements testified his indifference. His clothes were of costly material; but there was a carelessness in their arrangement, which would seem to belong more properly to one unaccustomed to the elegancies of life. The rich cloak of azure velvet, embroidered with golden lilies, the crest of the Augevin race, wore the appearance of having been dragged through a long and weary hunt, in which the brambles and underwood had left their undeniable marks. There were also traces of teeth on the border, as though the animal had seized it, perhaps in his death-struggle. The king's hose were of different colors, one being red, and the other white, as he often wore them; while his boots still retained traces of mud and mire. The fine ruffles on his hands were also torn in several places, and the plume of his cap soiled and broken. His features were pale, and rather effeminate; and his face wore a worried look, which gave it the appearance of premature age.

That Joanna with all her refinement, beauty, and intellect, should be chained to one every way her inferior, seems almost incredible; but king Robert imagined that by accomplishing a union between his lovely granddaughter and the son of his brother Carobert, he should effectually secure her kingdom against the inroads of the Hungarian princes, who had already put forward claims to it, and whose rapacity knew

no bounds. But far from promoting the desired end, it laid the foundation of all Joanna's future troubles.

Andreas had from his birth been surrounded by Hungarian attendants, whose manners never equalled in polish the more high-bred Neapolitans; there was therefore about the king a brusquerie, and insensibility to the feelings of others, which was far from making a favorable impression on the people whom he came to govern. Although some historians have invested Andreas with every vice, it is generally agreed that he was more weak than vicious; and that his misdemeanors were to be attributed in almost every instance to the evil counsels of his tutor, Father Roberto, and the example of his Hungarian adherents, who were noted for their boisterous and intemperate propensities. Not possessing sufficient energy for the honorable acquirement of wealth, and secure in the protection of the king, and Father Roberto, they revelled and feasted at the expense of the Italians, despite the angry murmurings of the oppressed people. The Friar took advantage of his influence over his pupil to instil into his mind a distrust and hatred towards the Neapolitans, whom he represented as crafty and designing—and a partiality for the Hungarians; a weakness to which is attributed the horrible end of Andreas. His attendants were all Hungarians; by the persuasions of the monk he persisted in maintaining the Hungarian attire, notwithstanding the representations of Joanna, who perceived the offence it gave to the hot-blooded Italians; and no inducements of the queen could alter the Hungarianism, and roughness of his manners, for he despised the foppery of the courtiers, but had not sufficient sense to avoid the other extreme. But with all his faults, Andreas both loved and respected his high-minded wife; and though not always disposed to follow her counsels, a reproving glance was sufficient to make him blush for any act of folly or excess. Perhaps it was this knowledge that prompted the mild forbearance of Joanna's conduct towards him; for a woman can forgive many faults if well-assured of the offender's love, but that once gone, the same lenity can no longer be extended.

In the present instance, the monk seemed to be urging a point of some importance; and as the king sat with head bent downwards, and eyes half-closed as though oppressed

with bodily suffering, a smile of contempt curled the lip of the friar, on perceiving that his royal dupe had neither strength of body or mind to resist his machinations. Like the treacherous serpent, he crawled closer and closer, and linked himself more firmly around the heart of his victim.

Andreas and Joanna were king and queen in name only; the whole business of state was in reality executed by the Hungarian monk, who, by reason of his influence as tutor to the king, had contrived to get the reins of government in his own hands, and the Neapolitan nobles were wronged, insulted, and oppressed—while the usurping Hungarians reaped the full benefit of this system of things.

"There is the Hungarian Count Rudolph," said Father Roberto, "to whom the Fates have assigned neither houses nor lands to support his newly-acquired dignity; and as a title seems but a jest with nothing to rely upon save a threadbare mantle, and a sword which has already done service to your highness, this same count has requested me to apply to the king for something wherewith to support his nobility. But being a modest man, he would not wish to appear a second time in the character of a petitioner, and therefore asked for my poor services to persuade you to bestow upon him some half-demolished castle to which he may retire; he not wishing at the same time to be aware that it was not a voluntary gift from his prince."

Andreas mused for a few moments, and then replied: "Count Rudolph? That same Hungarian who, if we mistake not, hath already made large demands upon our purse; he has wasted enough in feasting to buy up the castles of half the nobility. However, as thou sayest, Father, he must have a roof to cover his head, and at some future day we will ponder the matter over."

But the wily monk was not inclined to let the subject drop so quietly; with an appearance of great respect he continued:

"Your highness may perhaps wish to put an end to the matter at once; there is the partially dilapidated castle of Suvarro in Provence—it would be well suited to his countship, and we should then be rid of him at no great sacrifice."

"Partially dilapidated, sayest thou, Father Roberto? It must then have gone to ruin rather speedily, as in our last ride *there, we perceived* no symptoms of decay. The castle in

question we had destined to our faithful subject Gaetano, the young squire of the Count Giacomo Capanno, and his bride, Isoldina, our fair foster-sister, when the scruples of nurse Isolda are removed, and fortune once more smiles upon them—which we hope will be at no distant time, for well hath he deserved her."

"And so," exclaimed the friar, forgetting in his surprise his recent disparaging description, "you are about to bestow one of the fairest castles in Provence on this penniless Neapolitan squire? A fine figure of a man, forsooth! One who can perfume his own flowing curls, and trim his graceful beard without the aid of barber—one too who gazes fondly and caressingly on his own white hand, the while he is paying his devoirs to the fair queen Joanna! I have marked him well. Truly, languishing eyes and a mincing gait find their way quickly to a fair lady's heart; and our kind-hearted queen has, I see, prevailed on you to become the bestower of her generous bounty, and give to a well-favored courtier the reward of his long-tried services."

Father Roberto laughed long and loudly as he pronounced these words; and the blood quickly mounted to the brow of Andreas at his insolent freedom. There was also a well-timed hint that he was entirely under the influence of the queen; and nothing irritates a weak mind to a greater degree than a cunning insinuation of that weakness. The friar marked with pleasure the angry spot on the brow of his pupil; though his eyes were meekly cast down, and his arms folded, as he awaited his reply.

"Nay," said Andreas, "now thou dost mistake our purpose, good father; we mean not to favor the lazy coxcombs that throng the court—but despite thy remarks, this young squire seemeth not to have anything of the coxcomb about him. We are not a silly boy, to be made the toy of a woman's caprice, and follow whithersoever she may lead, and thou knowest not the queen, to suppose her an overbearing wife—Joanna is ever gentle and sweet-tempered.

The friar perceived that he had ventured far enough for the present with respect to the queen; it would not do to draw the cords too tight, or his dupe might weary of his bondage, and by one powerful effort set himself at liberty.

He decided that his plans must be more carefully laid, or the young king would see through their thin covering.

"But do you not know," rejoined Father Roberto, after a pause of some duration, "that the castle in question should rather reward the services of your faithful Hungarians, than become the spoil of this Neapolitan? I like not to see the lazy Italians bear off the prize from those who have earned it by the sweat of their brow and the labor of their hands. Let the worthless braggarts eat their macaroni, and inhabit the castles of their ancestors, without disturbing the fortunes of your faithful adherents. An Italian is always greedy, and never satisfied; a portion of the goods of fortune only whets his appetite, and engenders a taste for more."

Andreas sat musing for some time, without replying to this vehement speech; as if considering how he could best escape the scorn of the intriguing monk, and yet follow his own inclinations.

"This Gaetano hath rendered us a service," said the king at length, a blush of shame suffusing his face, as his eye sank beneath the basilisk glance of his companion; "It mattereth not its nature, but it meriteth some reward."

The friar smiled as he muttered to himself: "Ere the sun goes down upon my head, I will know the secret that moves the king in favor of a hungry Neapolitan."

Returning quickly to the argument, he continued: "Surely a service which hath benefited our prince should be communicated to his faithful subjects, in order that we may thank the noble squire, and empty our rather light purses into his willing hand."

The sneer which accompanied these words was far more expressive than the remark; and Andreas, hastily seizing a pen, transferred the castle at Provence to the Hungarian count—then dashing it across the table to his companion, he buried his face in his hands.

The monk calmly took it up, and after making sure of its contents, deposited it in his bosom. Then leaning towards the weak-minded king, he hissed in his ear: "Dost thou not love power? Carest thou not for its attendant glories? Why should a frail woman occupy the throne of Naples, and her lawful husband and master be excluded from a share *of the royal privileges*?"

Andreas gazed tremblingly around as though fearful of intrusion; and then fixing his gaze upon his tutor, listened with a species of fascination to his words.

"Did not thy wily father-in-law, the *good* king Robert, show a most unjust partiality towards the Neapolitans, when he excluded thee and thy Hungarian adherents from all share in the government? Is the fair kingdom of Naples to be ruled by a mere girl, and the business of state left to her caprice, whether to be transacted or not? Thou art cousin to the young queen thy wife, and of the same blood as he who, methinks, should more nobly have provided for thee."

The friar ceased, for a wild expression in the eyes of his companion warned him to proceed no farther; and seizing the arm of Father Roberto, he exclaimed: "Wretch, wouldst thou have me *murder* her?"

The countenance of the monk retained its calm and immovable expression; and he even gazed with a look of pity upon his companion, whose lips were white with indignation, while his whole frame trembled with the excess of his emotion.

"Have thee murder her?" he repeated as he fixed a cold penetrating gaze upon the agitated face of Andreas. "Have thee murder her? Ay, but thou shouldst not let the good work stop here; for when the first step is taken 'tis easy to perform the rest. I would have thee," he continued with a sneer, "I would have thee murder her sister also, the young Duchess of Durazzo; not openly, in case thy crimes might lead thee yet farther from the throne—but I can place in thy hands a secret poison that worketh its way surely and steadily to the heart. The victim expires not in horrible convulsions, with the features distorted as though with pain too great for human endurance—no, the body gradually sinks, and the face grows paler day by day. They sleep sweetly, and the couch of the dead is strewn with fresh spring flowers—while friends and relatives gather round to chant a requiem for the soul that's gone. *Requiescat in pace!* What, dost thou shudder at the picture I have drawn? Nay, I thought thy imagination must be familiar with these things, else thou couldst not so quickly have arrived at thy insane conclusion. Truly, thy mind must be affected to misjudge thy friends so strangely."

"O, forgive me, Father!" exclaimed Andreas, as sinking down weak and overcome he burst into tears. "My mind wanders with the fearful vision thou hast conjured up; just now my brain seemed on fire, and a crowd of frightful spectres passed before my view. Mater di Dio!" shrieked the unfortunate prince, "Ora! Ora! Ora!"

Shaking with an excess of terror, Andreas fell to the ground insensible, with the prayer unuttered on his lips.

"Weak, paltry coward!" muttered Father Roberto, as he stooped to raise him. "Truly, it is well to talk of power to such as thee! Thou hast not even sense enough to shake off the effect of thine own ridiculous fancies! Beshrew thee, fool! but our holy Lady listens not to such blasphemous prayers. Jesu Maria!" he exclaimed, while a slight shade of fear crossed his own countenance. "Can it be that he is indeed dead! Nay, I would not lose thee yet, most sapient prince; for I meditate the honor of making thee the footstool whereby I can attain the eminence of power and wealth that gleams brightly out in the distance."

After sprinkling his brow with some water from a crystal drinking-cup that stood near, the friar perceived that his eyes gradually unclosed, while a faint tinge returned to his pale cheek. Andreas gazed wildly around, and found himself lying upon a couch, while Father Roberto bent over him with an expression of anxious solicitude.

"Gaze steadfastly upon this, my son," said the monk, as he placed a cross within the king's hands, "and the vision will disappear."

Andreas mechanically received the holy symbol, and repeated the prayer which Father Roberto hastily murmured over him.

"My lord and prince," said the friar, with a respectful solicitude of manner, "exert yourself to throw off this womanly weakness, and let us return to the subject which has so strangely discomposed you. A more attentive perusal of the rosary, my son, and a benefice to the holy Church, would tend to allay your troubled mind. Masses are now being said for the soul of a faithful Catholic; does your highness feel willing to contribute your mite towards the furtherance of this good work?"

Andreas placed a well-filled purse in the hands of the

friar; who, as he remarked its weight, inwardly resolved that the Church alone should not be benefited by the heedless generosity of the king.

"Blessed be thy soul, which hath so generously given of its substance," said Father Roberto; "as a poor servant of Him who holds the keys of Saint Peter, even our own anointed Pope, I bestow upon thee in his name the blessing which thou hast merited. Masses shall be said for *thy* soul, which in number and fervor shall far exceed any that have yet been witnessed. But may that time be far distant, my beloved Prince, even as that appearance of renewed vigor proclaims."

Andreas soon after rose, and, ashamed of the agitation he had betrayed, stood whistling with an appearance of carelessness; but he avoided the eye of the friar.

"From childhood," continued Father Roberto with feigned emotion, "have I watched over, guarded, and instructed thee. When thy first nuptials with the princess Joanna were celebrated, and the acclamations of multitudes resounded in my ears, as thou with thy infant bride wert borne triumphantly in the gay throng, and surrounded by kings and princes, a vision of prophecy came over me; and I saw thee seated on the throne of Naples with thy beautiful consort, and wielding an equal sway over Naples, Provence, and Piedmont. I would not that thou shouldst deprive the young queen of her inheritance—far from it; but I would see thee hold an equal power over the united provinces, instead of bearing the empty title of king consort."

"But, father," returned Andreas, "even were I desirous of gaining this object, how is it to be effected? King Robert left the throne entirely to his heiress Joanna, with an express stipulation that any candidate of Hungarian birth be excluded from all share in the government."

"Thou sayest that the queen *lovest* thee," replied the friar. "Did she love thee truly, even as a husband *should* be loved, would she not rather share with thee her crown, than suffer thee to bear an inferior title? Require it of her as a proof of her love, and she will not refuse thee. The twentieth of September is the day of coronation—then thy station will be settled for life."

Father Roberto now prudently retired from the apartment, and left the king to meditate upon these words.

CHAPTER VI.

ANDREAS remained where the monk had left him, until the shadows of evening fell upon the city. For almost the first time in his life, he thought deeply; pondering upon the hints which had been so artfully thrown out. True, he was indeed of the same line as Joanna herself; the blood of the Augevin race flowed in his veins as well as in hers, therefore, why should he be content with an inferior title, when a share of the crown should be his by the right of inheritance? King Robert certainly had a right to dispose of his crown as he chose; but then it was little less than unjust to bestow it upon a mere girl, to the entire exclusion of his nephew. The question, 'Why was this so?' now forced itself upon his mind; and with the aid of Father Roberto's insinuations, he arrived at the right conclusion—namely, that he was too weak and inefficient to rule a powerful kingdom. Weak-minded! the idea roused his anger, and inspired him with courage to make the demand suggested by the imperious friar. Rising hastily, he was about to proceed to the queen's apartment, when a passing glance at his soiled attire caused him to hesitate. Was it fitting to present himself before his wife and sovereign with such an appearance of disrespect? He had already turned to summon the Hungarian, who always performed the office of valet to the king, but the remembrance of his fancied wrongs stayed his steps; and, disdaining to conform to the rules of etiquette on this occasion, he merely laid aside his cap with its soiled plume, smoothed his clothes into a more orderly appearance—and, still wearing his boots and spurs, approached the royal presence.

The soft, silken curtains waved gently in the night-breeze, and through the open windows came the rich perfume of the orange grove. A subdued light stole into the room, and rested here and there on the heavy couches and velvet *hangings; which*, falling in rich masses that seemed painted

with a midnight blackness where the light came not, glowed beneath a passing ray with the richest tints of the pencil. Small groups of statuary, sculptured by Italian genius, gleamed out pure and chaste; and a silvery radiance lit up the features of a marble madonna with an appearance of breathing life. The apartment was empty; and, as the low, soft cadences of a murmuring voice fell upon his ears, Andreas moved gently forward, and stood at the door of a small oratory.

Its walls were hung with a dark tapestry; and at the further end stood an altar covered with velvet of the same color. The light from a small hanging-lamp of chased silver fell upon the sweet face of Joanna, who knelt upon a low cushion, with upraised eyes and bright lips parted, as she repeated the evening prayer. The "Ave Maria" was never breathed by a sweeter voice; and as Andreas gazed upon that picture of high-born loveliness and purity, he experienced a bitter, humbling feeling of inferiority. He felt that he was rough and unpolished in mind, forbidding, and almost deformed in personal appearance, while *she* was before him rich in every gift; beauty whose softness charmed the eye; mental powers that won the admiration of all; and that indescribable grace of manner which is the pure offspring of nature, and can never be acquired. Why the difference? Then his mind reverted to those early lessons which had moulded him into what he now was; to the rude, riotous manners of his Hungarian adherents, and the crafty government of Father Roberto.

His slovenly dress increased these uncomfortable feelings; and, repenting the anger which caused this neglect, he was about softly to retrace his steps, for the purpose of arraying himself more consistently, but his wife had risen from her knees, and now came forward to meet him. A graceful robe of black velvet displayed the fine proportions of her slender form, and her arms were adorned with bracelets of pearl; while these, her favorite jewels, were also twined amid her hair. Every movement spoke the queen; and yet, the sweetness of her smile was all expressive of the woman and the wife. A slight cloud gathered on the fair brow, as she noticed the careless attire of her husband; but carefully abstaining from all reproof, she welcomed him with a smile.

The king knelt at her feet, and pressed her hand to his

lips. Joanna smiled at this courtier-like homage, and playfully bade him rise.

"I would not have thee kneel to me as the queen, Andreas —with thee let the queen be lost in the wife; I see enough of this mummery at the court. I have sometimes envied the careless peasant-girl, as she tripped merrily along, and poured forth the gladness of her heart in some blithe carol; while the crown pressed heavily on my brow, and my heart was clouded with care. Thou shalt be a subject, Andreas; but I would hold thee in the bonds of love—not those of royalty."

"Here let me remain," replied Andreas almost proudly; "here is my proper place, for art thou not the queen, Joanna? my sovereign, who can command my homage, my services, my liberty? But I am king in name only; with me 'tis an empty title. Not even in private should the husband forget what is due a wife, whose rank is so far above his own."

Joanna had a quick perception, and the reply almost rose to her lips that a soiled and careless attire was hardly consistent with these ideas of reverence and respect; but, although the smile assumed a merrier cast, she restrained herself, and said, as she passed her jewelled fingers caressingly through his disordered hair:

"Thou art but a wilful boy, Andreas, and I must even let thee have thy way. But 'tis time to put an end to this mock ceremony; I am almost wearied of the name of queen."

"Nay, jest not now, Joanna!" replied the king almost fiercely. "This is no time for jesting! A 'wilful boy'—ay, there it is! And I am treated, too, as a wilful, hot-headed child, that is unfit to govern himself, much less to govern others! Fatal, fatal mistake that caused our union! The weak-minded son of the King of Hungary was no fitting match for the heiress of Naples!" continued he in a tone of intense bitterness. "The images of an unloved and neglected childhood—a clouded and suffering youth are before me. Why am I living, breathing still, when all around mock me with their happiness? What have I to do with the gay throng?"

Joanna gazed with a soft and pitying look upon the speaker, and sighed, as she saw how unequal the weak frame was to the fit of passion that convulsed it.

Andreas heard the low sigh, and angrily exclaimed: "Why dost thou sigh? It is scarcely fitting that a *queen* should

sigh—one so young and beautiful! Methinks *thou* canst scarcely complain of an unhappy childhood; well do I remember how even then thy praises resounded from ear to ear, while I stood neglected, or was assailed with mock respect that ill concealed the lurking scorn. Perchance it was *pity* caused the sigh—pity for *me!* I pray thee spare it—I would have more enduring marks of love!"

"Andreas," said the queen softly and tenderly, as one would soothe a wayward child, "I have not deserved these reproaches; never, by word or look, have I given thee cause to complain of me as a wife—thy hasty words"—

"Ay," was the bitter reply, "thou hast indeed been a pattern wife! Every word and look has been carefully guarded that I, poor fool! might delude myself with the belief of thy *love!*"

"What more wouldst thou have, my husband?" asked Joanna with a sweet smile. "Have I not told thee of my love? This is almost ungallant."

"I would have an equal share of power!" rejoined Andreas, not doubting that the cunning insinuations of the friar were correct, and she loved him not. The calm eye of the queen was fixed steadfastly upon him, and her cheek was very pale, but he continued: "I have been unjustly excluded from the throne, Joanna; as thy kinsman, methinks my claims were entitled to more consideration. A mere cipher in the palace of the queen, I daily see those of plebeian birth elevated to stations of trust and importance, whose favor is far more powerful than that of the royal consort. Is it right that this should be?"

"I expected this not at thy hands, Andreas," replied the queen sadly; "I looked not to be accused by thee of harboring partialities for unworthy favorites. Philippa the Catanese has but received a slight, very slight reward for the faithful services of years. It were ungrateful in me to forget my governess and friend—she who from infancy watched over me with all a mother's solicitude, and whose manner has ever been that of respectful devotion. Thou hast overrated her influence; no persuasions, even of the dearest friend, could induce Joanna to accede to what she knew to be wrong. Something has ruffled thy mind, Andreas—any request that the queen may properly grant shall be freely given thee."

"I believe thee," returned the unhappy youth; "should I request thy jewelled bracelet, or a ring from yon fair hand, it would not be refused. But I am no froward child, lady, to be appeased by a glittering toy, and soothed into obedience; I have asked thee to restore a right that has been most unjustly withheld, and thou dost refuse to grant it. While yet there was a king to watch that the child injured not himself nor others with his gilded plaything, the sceptre was placed in his hands, and *then* our power was equal; but, on the death of King Robert, the dignity of the crown was vested in one more worthy to assume it."

"I cannot grant thy request, Andreas, for I *dare* not—were it but a question of pre-eminence between us two, willingly would I resign the crown to thee, my husband; but the happiness of a nation is at stake. Already are the Neapolitans disgusted with the tyranny of Father Roberto, and his Hungarians, and were they possessed of greater power, I should tremble for the result. Some one hath urged thee to this measure—I cannot believe thou wouldst deliberately wrong Joanna; for though the queen is obliged to sacrifice her wishes to the welfare of those who acknowledge her as their sovereign, yet, as a wife, her love and her duties remain the same."

A rough education had not been able to stifle all good feeling in the breast of Andreas, and Joanna's graceful beauty and unrivalled sweetness of temper softened even the harshest truths; her last words, when spoken in her sweet, low voice, and issuing from a mouth of perfect beauty, left rather a softening impression than otherwise.

There was a pause of some minutes, for there is no withstanding *truth;* and then in a very different frame of mind, Andreas, affected and subdued, turned to leave the apartment. But the queen, with a pardoning smile, held out her hand in token of reconciliation, as she said:

"We part friends, Andreas—if I have spoken hastily or unkindly, forgive me, as I do thee."

The young king, overcome by this mark of noble feeling, pressed a passionate kiss on the fair palm; and Joanna, as he knelt, felt a hot tear drop upon it. Then rising hastily, he rushed from the room, and sought the shaded walks of the garden. But the cool night air refused to allay the burning

of his fevered brow, and then rose to mind the conversation of Father Roberto, and his look of withering scorn, when the ill success of his mission should be made known to him. Wearied with conflicting emotions, Andreas turned restlessly upon his couch, and in vain sought that sleep which refused to visit his troubled mind.

Joanna sat musing sadly in the deep recess of a window that opened on the bay of Naples. She had treated the demand of Andreas lightly; but still she felt it as an overpowering blow, and well she knew the quarter from whence it came. She sighed as she remembered the tear that had fallen upon her hand, and reflected that with his occasional glimpses of good feeling, Andreas, in different hands, might be very differently modelled. The clear rays of moonlight fell upon the pure brow and exquisite features of the young queen, while the jewels on her arms gleamed brightly out amid the folds of dark velvet. She mused, too, on the strange fate that placed her, a girl of seventeen, amid the cares and turmoils of a court, with the glittering crown of Naples upon her brow. It was a toy for which all were striving—for which the life of a mere girl involved a nation's fate; an ornament which pressed on her its weighty cares, and changed the happy, careless spirit of girlhood into the dignified and thinking woman. Then her thoughts reverted to the designing monk, who had obtained an influence so unbounded over the mind of Andreas, and to whose rapacity nothing seemed too high. He had too firmly established himself in his present position to be easily dismissed, and she saw no relief from his intrusive presence. Then the figure of Philippa rose before her, faithful and devoted as she had ever been; and she felt that there was at least *one* in that crowd of worshipping followers, whose devotion was that of the heart. The early dream of the Catanese had been realized; she was indeed one among that gorgeous throng, and though past her fiftieth year, the extraordinary charms of youth were preserved to a great degree. The hair still retained its rich glossy blackness, and the eye its wonted fire, while her cheek was still fresh and blooming. She was appointed by king Robert nurse to the queen, Violante—married to the seneschal of the palace—and rose at length to the rank of countess. Although ambitious and designing, and hating with the intensity of her Italian nature all who crossed her path, Philippa

never forgot to whom she owed her rise from the humble station in which her birth had placed her; and her gratitude to the granddaughter of King Robert was tender and devoted.

Meantime the heavy curtains were put noiselessly aside, and as the queen started at the sound of a footfall, the object of her thoughts stood before her. Joanna had turned quickly at the intrusion, before she discovered who it was that had thus broken her privacy—and Philippa was about to return, when the queen, smiling a welcome, bade her be seated.

"I have come, lady, for a boon," said the Catanese.

"What!" replied Joanna; "hast thou too learned the use of being a courtier, my lady countess? Truly, we are besieged with boons of all sizes and qualities; what may thine be, good Philippa? Nothing that will involve our happiness, we trust?"

"Nay, lady," rejoined Philippa, "mine is but a small one. I have no occasion to ask large favors, for they are showered upon me by a generous hand, almost before the wish is uttered. My request is, that your majesty would accept my humble services to-night in the place of a tiring-woman, as in times of old, that I may once more hear you speak without the restraint of intrusive listeners."

Joanna smiled, though it was a sad smile, as she reflected on the difference between this request and the one that had preceded it—and gracefully accorded her permission.

There was a majesty in the person of the Catanese, and a proud turn of the head, which is supposed to belong exclusivly to high birth; and the haughty nobility, who could ill brook to see a fisherman's daughter preferred before themselves, accused her of arrogance on account of her sudden elevation. But Philippa would have been the same in any rank of life; *her* pride was nature, not art: and had she been but the wife, as well as the daughter of a fisherman, there would have been the same haughty step, that seemed as though it disdained the ground it trod upon—the same self-possession, and fearless, unquailing eye. A robe of purple silk was thrown around her splendid figure, and carelessly fastened at the waist with a jewelled girdle; no coiffure disturbed the symmetry of the finely formed head; thick bands of midnight hair lay piled around the noble brow, and a hand and arm of perfect beauty were displayed by the falling sleeve.

"Philippa," said the queen, "hast thou not noticed how often the eye of that young squire of the Count Capanno turns with a loving glance on the fair features of Isoldina, the king's foster sister? They should have been wed by this time, methinks, for the young man nobly won his bride on that fearful night of the tempest; and if we mistake not, the maiden's face shows anything but indifference."

"I have observed his amorous looks," replied the Catanese; "but I have also noticed, lady, that when his eye happens to fall on her witch of a mother, the nurse Isolda, it is lit up with something very different from love. On that night when he perilled life to gain the maiden, Isolda promised that she should be his; but now that the danger is past, she neglects her promise; and having, by means of one excuse and another put off the marriage day, she now drives the brave squire almost to frenzy by a rude Hungarian rival."

"Does not the maiden love him?" asked Joanna.

"She is an *Hungarian*," said Philippa, emphatically, "and loves not as an Italian loves. The blood flows coldly in her veins, and with her this love is an ornamental appendage—not the master-passion of her being. She is fair, but her beauty is that of the calm, untroubled lake, across which the ripples glide smoothly and evenly, without one tumultuous wave. I love not a heart of ice, lady—and a fiery spirit can never harmonize with a nature that has no passion; yet the youth is a good and a brave one, and deserves not such treatment."

"It is, indeed, unjust, as thou sayest," replied the queen, "and we must inquire into the matter, and endeavor to remove Isolda's scruples."

"Her scruples," returned Philippa, "are on the score of his being an Italian—not that she feels overcome by an excess of honor, but because she thinks him not good enough for her Hungarian daughter, forsooth! Pity the youth had not contented himself with some warm-hearted Italian maiden."

"I am afraid thou art prejudiced, Philippa," said the queen. "The maiden is a fair and an amiable one, and Isolda, although she may have faults, hath ever shown a zeal for the welfare of the king."

"It is not prejudice, lady," replied the Catanese, "although the rude Hungarians were never to my taste with their boisterous rioting."

"Thou dost forget," returned Joanna, "that the king himself is a prince of the Hungarian line, and therefore thy words, Philippa, have an inference to the husband of thy sovereign."

As the queen uttered these words, a crimson flush—it might be of anger, it might be of *shame*—mounted even to her fair brow.

Philippa's momentary warmth vanished immediately, as she saw the pain her words had occasioned one whom she loved, almost worshipped; and in a respectful tone she said:

"Forgive me, lady, if I have wounded you by any inadvertent speech, but believe me that I mean it not."

Joanna's displeasure was never of long duration; and the angry spot soon passed away, and was succeeded by the wonted smile.

"Philippa," said the queen, as other thoughts rushed upon her mind, "likest thou this Father Roberto?"

"Like him!" exclaimed Philippa, unguardedly, while the warm Italian blood rushed into her face. "*Like* him!—Does one like a loathsome reptile that continually crosses one's path, and suffers its venom to expend itself in angry hissings because fearful of its adversary's strength? *Like* him, lady! Our natures assimilate even as would the fire of yonder burning mountain and the water that flows beneath us!"

Joanna gazed in speechless astonishment upon her companion, whose fine countenance now expressed the utmost scorn and loathing. It was as though she had unconsciously stepped upon a hidden train, and now sat almost trembling at the flame which she had raised.

"Pardon me, my gracious sovereign," said the Catanese, "if I have spoken in an unseemly manner in the royal presence, but indeed I like him not."

The queen still marvelled at the effect her words had produced, while she replied: "Nay, Philippa, I looked not to see such a storm gather upon your brow at a simple question; although I profess not much love for this Hungarian monk, for I fear that his designs are not what they should be, I would not accuse a man wrongfully; but surely the dark looks and murmured vengeance that I have seen directed towards Father Roberto, must have arisen from some misdemeanor of his own."

"Imagine, lady, a villain of the deepest dye, and you have

the true character of the hypocritical monk!" exclaimed the excited Catanese.

"But I would know, my good Philippa, what has thus roused thee," replied the queen. "Has any insult been offered thee by the friar, or is it the wrongs which others have received at his hands, that moved thee to speak so freely respecting his conduct? There must be more in this than meets the eye. Speak, Philippa."

For a few moments there was no reply. The wily monk had not, indeed, offered to the favorite any pointed insult, that might expose him to the queen's censure: he had never said that he hated her, and would leave no means untried to rid himself of his enemy;—he had never *said* this, but Philippa knew that it was so, and that he thwarted her plans, and sought to undermine her favor with the most untiring diligence. Therefore she returned his hatred tenfold; but Joanna's question involved her in a difficulty. She blushed to unfold to the queen all the various little causes of enmity—the petty warfare in which courtiers are constantly engaged;—things which she considered not as the *cause* of that rupture which existed between them, but rather the effect of the hatred itself. Joanna would regard these little peccadilloes as things to smile at rather than resent, without perceiving that they were but as rivulets, which flow from a larger stream. Therefore Philippa resolved to waive, for the present, her own wrongs, trusting that the time would come when they too should be redressed.

"You asked me, lady," she replied at length, "whether I liked this friar, and I fear that I replied rather unbecomingly in the royal presence; but my passions are warm as the clime that gave me birth, and I waited not till they should moderate. I *hate* him—nay, start not, lady!" continued Philippa, as the queen shuddered at the intensity of passion that spoke through the set teeth. "I have little cause to love him on mine own account; but can I hope to be otherwise treated when I daily see him insult and wrong the Neapolitan nobles, who tremble before the rapacity of a ragged friar? He is the plague-spot of Naples."

Joanna sat with her face shaded by her hands, so that the Catanese could not read its expression. She had long beheld these grievances; the tale was therefore familiar to her ears, and she made no reply to the words of her companion. She

longed to fly from that scene of brawl and disturbance to some quiet retreat; to cast off the fetters of royalty, which became a mockery when wrongs and outrage were daily perpetrated, which she possessed not the power to redress. But then the *queen* triumphed over the woman, and she resolved to submit calmly to her fate. Never would she have performed the part that Christina did, when she abdicated her throne, and abandoned her native land and devoted subjects to seek recreation in a foreign clime. Joanna possessed true nobility of soul, joined to a refined and cultivated mind, which she never, during her lifetime, sullied by one degraded act.

At length the queen arose, and parting aside the curtains, looked forth upon the night. That was calm and tranquil; it bore not the impress of human passions, and long Joanna stood and gazed. The moonlight shone brightly into the apartment, and lay in soft, silvery floods upon the massive furniture and dark hangings, lighting up the features of the inmates with a celestial radiance.

"I would be unrobed, Philippa," said the queen; "'tis midnight, and the couch were a pleasant exchange for the heavy robes."

Joanna hastily unfastened the bracelets from her arms, as though their clasp were painful, and flung them upon a couch, from which they rolled, and were lost among the falling drapery.

Philippa bent down to recover the gems, and as she raised her head after a successful search, she turned her eyes towards the queen, but Joanna's face was averted. As she presented the jewelled posset-cup, she noticed traces of tears on the queen's countenance; but delicacy prevented her from giving utterance to what seemed like impertinent curiosity, and drawing the velvet curtains in silence, she left Joanna to repose.

CHAPTER VII.

In a retired apartment of the palace sat a monk of the Franciscan order. A cowl shaded and almost concealed his features; his feet were entirely bare, and his dress consisted of a long, loose robe, confined at the waist by a thick rope, from whence hung his breviary and cross. The furniture of the room was simple as his dress; the only article of value in the apartment being a curiously constructed cabinet, formed of ebony, and inlaid and clasped with pure gold: it opened entirely by secret springs, and all signs of drawer or key were invisible. A small stand, covered with a snow-white cloth, stood by the side of the friar, on which were placed a common horn drinking-cup filled with water, and a hard crust of bread. An open book lay upon his knee, but his thoughts seemed to be occupied with other subjects than those contained in the volume before him. This was the notorious Father Roberto, who, during the former part of Joanna's reign, governed Naples with an invisible power. Princes trembled at his frown, and many an unfortunate noble read his doom in the malignant glare of those piercing eyes. Scarcely was an enemy discovered than he quickly disappeared—often found with the assassin's dirk still sticking in his bosom, and at other times a bloated and discolored corpse. But the friar's usual manner was that of mock humility; with eyes cast down, and hands meekly folded on his breast, he passed among the crowd and invoked a blessing on the many heads that reverently bowed before him. Gold flowed into his hands, but his frugal habits altered not; the same coarse robe enveloped his form, and his diet was uniformly of the simplest kind.

Petrarch thus describes him: "A horrible animal, with bald head and bare feet; short in stature, swollen in person, with worn out rags torn studiously to show his naked skin; who not only despises the supplications of the citizens of Naples, but from the vantage-ground of his feigned sanctity, treats with scorn the embassy of the Pope. Yet this is not marvellous,

because his pride is founded on the treasures he accumulates; for from what is reported, it appears that his caskets full of gold do not accord with the rags he wears. He wears no crown, nor brocade, nor silk; but with a squalid mantle, filthy and torn, which covers but half his swollen body, and with a crouching gait—bent not by age but by hypocrisy—he rules with unutterable arrogance and tyranny the court of the queen; oppresses the weak, treads justice under foot, confounds all things human and divine; and like a new Palinurous or Tiphys, sits at the helm of this great vessel, which, from what I can discern, will quickly go to the bottom."

But the poet is accused of exerting the powers of his fancy on things real as well as imaginary, and therefore his descriptions are generally regarded as exaggerations. The rapacity and domineering insolence of this Hungarian friar had driven him from Naples; and no marvel that the contrast with the elegant and refined court of King Robert, where he had been a welcome and honored visitor, called forth his loudest powers of invective.

Father Roberto at length rose and approached the cabinet. Upon touching a spring the lid flew back, and disclosed to his eager gaze a glittering heap of jewels. There were heavy rings, and bracelets that could only have clasped arms of patrician beauty; pure oval-shaped stones, that threw around a blaze of fiery light. The gloating eyes of the friar drank in their splendid beauties, as he muttered to himself: "Power and wealth!—the cravings of my soul attained, but not satisfied: no! there is still a shadow in my path, and that shadow," said he, breaking into a scornful laugh, whose harsh tones rang through the quiet apartment,—"that shadow is the fisherman's daughter of Catania—Philippa, the newly-created Countess of Montoni! I owe thee a lasting grudge, fair countess," continued the monk, as he bared his right arm and displayed a ghastly scar: "I cannot soon forget that pleasant evening on the moonlit beach; it has left with me a mark never to be effaced. Thy star is still bright as when first thou didst gaze upon it; but I can discern a cloud that, slight as it is, ever hovers near it. Some not far distant day it will break in rolling thunders over thy head; and then will that proud, unbending form be bowed—ay, down to the very dust! It will do me good to see thee writhing at my feet, poor tool whom I

have raised!—raised to become an obstacle in my way. Soon shalt thou see that the word of the friar Roberto is far more powerful than the signet-ring that encircles the finger of our fair queen!"

He drew forth a small drawer, filled with vials of a colorless liquid, and continued musingly: "This would soon put an end to thy ambition, fair countess—soon remove thee from my path; then, why do I hesitate? 'Tis not because of thy beauty, for Joanna of Naples is still fairer, with a mouth of melting softness, and eyes that beam with love, —while thine, lovely countess, express too much of the lioness for a meek-tempered friar like me; and yet, with all her beauty, the queen herself should not stand in the way of my advancement. I spare thee, for something whispers that a more triumphant revenge is at hand; there would be small glory in thy passing away, without recognising him who gave the death-blow—I would see thee quail before me, and beg and pray for a few hours of life. *That* would be revenge. It might be playing with dangerous weapons to practise on a pupil almost as well-skilled in the art as myself; these Italians come by it naturally—'tis born with their very breath. No,—I will let thee rest under the weight of thy newly-acquired honors for the present."

Father Roberto now glanced on the glittering wealth of jewels, and murmured: "A propitiatory offering to the shrine of the Virgin may not be amiss." He turned them to the light one after another, and at length selected a magnificent chain of curious workmanship. Fine braids of gold were intersected, at various distances, by gems the rarest and most exquisite; the opal threw forth its changeful gleams by the side of the glowing diamond and rose-colored ruby. "This chain," said he, "could only have been the work of Matteo Vivaldi; I would first see if he remembers it."

Father Roberto, concealing the chain within the folds of his ample robe, now carefully closed the cabinet; and assuming a slow and solemn step, as became one of his holy capacity, left the apartment. Descending the marble staircase, he passed a rich saloon, with its pillars of fluted alabaster, and soon gained the outer court. Threading his way through the numerous streets, he arrived at the suburbs of the city, where stood the shop of Matteo Vivaldi, the goldsmith.

It was, in appearance, plain and unpretending; but within were the most priceless jewels of Naples. No one was so renowned for working cunning devices in gold as Vivaldi; his workmanship possessed all the airy creation and elegant finish of Benvenuto Cellini; and his fame was the pride of the court ladies, and the envy of his fellow-workmen. But Vivaldi's humble abode contained a jewel of far more value than the gems which sparkle on the bosom of high-born beauty; this was his daughter Beatrice. The young nobles, as they lounged idly about the shop, had sometimes caught a glimpse of a gorgeous apartment, that seemed strangely at variance with the humble dwelling. Hangings of a pale rose-color threw a soft glow over the rich furniture, that seemed as though gathered from all parts of the world to tempt the admiration of the fair occupant. Carpet of the finest Turkish fabric—vases and urns bearing the chaste proportions of a Grecian sculptor—couches glowing with velvet and gold—all were heaped together in splendid confusion.

Bright and varying as the glowing sunset, that stops to toy with the rippling waves—soft as the smiles of a summer sky, was the beauty of Beatrice Vivaldi. Like some sweet, indistinct vision that glides into the mind, and lingers there like a half-forgotten remembrance to visit us in dreams, was the face that, buried in that grand apartment, saw little of the moving world without. A shower of golden sunbeams, almost to the slender feet fell those waves of glorious hair, that changed ever with the changeful light. The long, dark lashes that veiled those deep violet eyes, rested on a cheek whose faint tint resembled the just opening rose. Broad bands of gold encircled the beautifully-moulded arms, and jewels sparkled on the snowy bosom.

She was his treasure; and as the miser guards his hoarded gold, did the old man guard his daughter. She was no beauty of noble birth, whose charms, encircled with the halo of rank, command universal homage. A jewel, without its setting, is soon lost or flung aside; and, shutting her up from the prying gaze of the idle and impertinent, Vivaldi delighted in surrounding her with the outward appearance of greatness. Many a rare trophy, the forfeited property of some bankrupt noble, found its way to the boudoir of the gold-

smith's daughter. As he gazed upon the exquisite form of the young Beatrice, Vivaldi would smile bitterly, as he marked the patrician grace that spoke in every movement. He wished her to live in her gorgeous prison-house, surrounded by her birds and flowers, without knowledge of that envied rank from which she was excluded. Now and then a wild scheme crossed his brain, and he would dream of sending her to court, loaded with wealth and jewels from his untold hoards, there to receive, under an assumed name, the homage due her peerless charms. But then, the difficulties and dangers of such an undertaking rose before him, and the goldsmith dismissed it, as a wild dream never to be realized.

Father Roberto entered the shop, where stood Vivaldi deeply engaged in conversation with a man closely muffled in his cloak. As the friar advanced, he gazed sharply at the visitor—his usual wily caution keeping him from unfolding the purpose of his visit before a third person.

The goldsmith perceived his uneasiness; and, smiling while he looked towards the visitor, observed: "'Tis only an honest neighbor of mine, worthy father; make thyself scarce, good Pietro, while we hold a short conference together."

The man vanished into an adjoining apartment; and Father Roberto, after an investigating glance about the shop, drew forth the chain, and held it up before his companion as he asked: "Knowest thou this chain, Vivaldi?"

The goldsmith was a small man, with a swarthy skin and a dark, piercing eye, whose glances had often disconcerted the monk, though he could not divine the cause. As he spoke, the two men stood gazing at each other, with a look that seemed to penetrate the very soul. Vivaldi, quick-witted and well-skilled in physiognomy, soon read what was passing in the mind of the monk; and muttered to himself: "I'll be even with you yet, holy father!" In the meantime, his countenance expressed not the slightest emotion, and the friar was at a loss what to draw from his words.

"Know I this chain, holy father?" said Vivaldi, as he carelessly examined the workmanship. "Truly, a pretty bauble. This chain was made in Genoa; I can easily recognise their style. Pity though that Naples owns not such master-pieces of genius—but there the goldsmiths not only *work* in gold, but actually coin the precious metal for their own

especial use; and in Florence——But 'tis against all established rules, father, to slander Naples, the city of beauty."

As he uttered these words, the goldsmith glanced at Father Roberto, who replied:

"In Genoa, sayest thou, Vivaldi? I thought it had been of Neapolitan workmanship," continued he with a searching glance, "and from the cunning hands of Matteo Vivaldi."

"Nay, father," was the rejoinder, as he examined the finely wrought links, "you do me too much honor. By the mass! saving your holy presence, could I but produce an article like this, my fortune were made at once; and the humble name of Matteo Vivaldi would ring throughout the city. 'Tis splendid—superb! Only examine the fineness and beauty of the workmanship—not that of my clumsy hands."

A sudden fit of humility seemed to have overtaken the goldsmith, for he usually vaunted his achievements most loudly, and disdained all competition; but his eye quailed not beneath the piercing gaze of the friar, and Father Roberto continued:

"It is, as thou hast observed, a pretty toy, though I trouble me not with the fashion of this world's baubles. Gold and precious stones, what are they? Even as the grass that perisheth. But our good prince Andreas, being but ill at ease in mind, would lay it as an offering at the shrine of our Holy Lady; and I would first have thy judgment, good Matteo, to see if the stones be faultless."

Vivaldi's keen glance discovered that two of the largest diamonds had been abstracted, and their place supplied by an artificial compound, that required the nicest perception to detect the difference. This he now pointed out to the monk, who feigned a well-acted surprise, though perfectly aware of the circumstance, to which he had called the goldsmith's attention, in order to ascertain if the artifice could be detected.

"The lying Italian knaves!" he exclaimed, "to impose upon the king with their false stones! Pity the knaves could not be brought to punishment!"

"They may have come pure from the jeweller's hands," rejoined the goldsmith, nettled at this allusion to his countrymen, "and been abstracted afterwards."

Father Roberto's eyes fairly flashed, as bending towards the offender, in a whisper hoarse with rage, he asked: "How meanest thou, Vivaldi? Did I hear thee aright?"

"No wonder that you are moved, holy father," replied Vivaldi, with imperturbable composure. "I mean that the swarm of lazy followers who throng a palace are seldom honest, more's the pity! and your just rage was for the iniquity of fallen fellow-creatures. But leave the chain with me, father, and I promise to remedy the fault in a short space of time. Our Holy Lady would spurn the offering of false diamonds at her sacred shrine."

Nothing could be gained from the impenetrable goldsmith; and though sorely against his will, Father Roberto left the chain in the hands of Vivaldi to replace the missing gems; and passed again into the city, saying to himself:

"It cannot be his workmanship, and yet it strangely resembles it! But being ignorant of the motive that prompted the inquiry, he could have no reason for deceiving me. 'Tis well for thee, master jeweller, that thine were not the hands which joined its well-wrought links, or I would not answer long for thy safety!"

In the meantime Vivaldi watched the friar's receding form until it was lost in the distance; then returning to the chain, he smiled as he passed one shining link after another through his hands. "Men forget not so easily a task, over which they have racked their brains as I have mine upon this well-remembered trinket. Many weary nights have I spent over thee, thou senseless bauble!—but I grudge not the labor, since it serves to unfold what were but suspected without this convincing proof, and no man can be convicted on suspicion. 'Twill serve to settle our accounts, worthy friar; 'lying Italian thieves!'—lying *Hungarian* thieves were nearer the truth! The very chain which the ill-fated Marquis di Rosalba—"

"Who speaks of Rosalba?" exclaimed a voice, as the speaker emerged from an inner chamber, while the cloak which fell aside displayed the rich dress of a Neapolitan noble.

"I will put the same question to you, my lord Count Beltrame," said Vivaldi, "that the black-hearted friar but now put to me: 'know you this chain?'"

The countenance of the young noble changed, and an expression of fierce anger passed over it, as he replied: "This

chain belongs to Rosalba, my bosom friend! His disappearance, Vivaldi, is now no mystery—he has met with foul play, and from the treacherous monk. But I marvel," continued he, as he examined the chain, "I marvel that one so cautious as the villainous friar should place the ornament in thy hands, Vivaldi: what could tempt him to the act?"

"I will tell you, replied the goldsmith.' "The holy father, notwithstanding his coarse robe and humble appearance, has amassed countless wealth—partly the property of those he has murdered, or whom his arts have driven to seek a refuge in a foreign country, and partly enormous bribes collected from those who employ him as a willing agent in deeds of wickedness. Some twinge of conscience has induced him to make an offering to the shrine of the Virgin, which he does in the name of Andreas, to prevent suspicion. Supposing rightly enough that the chain is my workmanship, he wishes to be convinced of this, and comes here with the pretence of employing me to examine the diamonds. Had I said aught that might lead to a suspicion of the truth, a drugged glass or a sharp dagger would soon remove the troublesome goldsmith. But happily I succeeded in placing him on a wrong track, and retained the chain by a fortunate discovery that two of the diamonds were false. So here it is, and by the time it returns to the holy father, a storm will be brewing over his head that he wots little of."

"And one that others too may wot little of!" returned the noble. "The despicable, black-hearted villain!"

Count Beltrame remained for some time in deep thought; and every now and then his brows contracted, and a fierce light shot from his eyes. At length he turned, and with a searching glance scanned every feature of Vivaldi's countenance. It was not open in its expression, but it spoke of determination, hatred, and a desire for revenge, as he returned the investigation of the young noble with an answering gaze.

Apparently the count was satisfied, and his suspicions, if he had any, cleared; for, approaching the goldsmith, he asked: "Are the sturdy fellows ready to strike a decisive blow?"

"They are," replied Vivaldi; "fresh wrongs, and the remembrance of old insults from the rapacious Hungarians that throng the court of Naples, are goading them on to some desperate deed."

"Are they ready for murder?—Calm, deliberate *murder?*" said the young noble, hoarsely, as he bent towards the goldsmith.

Vivaldi started at the fearful tone of the speaker, who continued with a low laugh: "Ay, *murder*, man! Is there anything so very horrible in ridding the city of a pest who kills, poisons, and banishes at his own sovereign pleasure? Who is fast draining the treasury of Naples, to fatten the greedy Hungarians?"

"Not a man among them but will lend a helping hand towards sending the holy friar from this wicked world."

"'Tis not the friar I mean," said the other quietly.

Vivaldi now gazed in the utmost surprise at the speaker, who inquired: "So, then, thou hast never heard of midnight meetings in a strong castle among the Apennines? Of secret conclaves at Capua, and a brooding fear that hangs over the city like a dark cloud?"

"In truth, I have heard vague rumors of these meetings," returned the goldsmith, "and of the discontent of powerful barons, but never of their purport."

"I know not," said the noble, musingly, "whether the fierce marshal Giacomo Capanno may relish any addition to our numbers—but I think I may trust thee, Vivaldi; for if even wert thou disposed to be treacherous, there is a little private enmity on thine own account, that will keep thee to thy faith."

Vivaldi bent down lower—still lower, as if prepared for some fearful tale that should be breathed forth in whispered tone; and the Neapolitan continued: "Where a tree is diseased, lop not the topmost branches, but strike steadily at the root. Put this friar out of the way, and a short time will consternation reign at court—a short time will Andreas bewail the loss of his favorite and *friend*—and then some one among the remaining tribe, more cunning than the rest, will take the place of his predecessor, and follow in his footsteps. Free the Neapolitans of this weak-minded prince, and his crowd of Hungarian followers will soon fly in dismay."

Vivaldi seemed stunned by this bold proposal; and for some time neither spoke.

CHAPTER VIII.

The palace gardens lay sleeping beneath the golden clouds of sunset, and the sweet breath of eve was abroad upon the air. Now dark, and mysterious amid the shadows, seemed those wooded walks—and anon lit up by the sunlight into the semblance of a fairy scene. Passing along one of the winding paths were a youth and a maiden. The former was tall and graceful, with an eye of fire, and a countenance glowing with enthusiasm, while it lacked not the points of manly beauty. There was a truthful, earnest expression in the face, and a high and noble spirit written on the brow. The young girl is the fair sleeper, who, rapt in her bright dreams upon that fearful night, heeded not the raging tempest. The eyes that turn so sweetly and confidingly upon her companion, are dark and lustrous, while the swimming tears give a soft, subdued glow to their brilliancy.

"Gaetano," murmured the rich, musical voice in a tone of sadness, "thy dreams are brilliant and cheering, and seem to reproach my melancholy; but alas! they *are* but dreams—doomed, I fear, never to be realized. 'Tis only last night that my mother reproached me, and drove me to tears, because I remonstrated when she bade me smile upon the Hungarian, Oscar. She dislikes and fears thee, Gaetano, because thou art an Italian, and I fear she will never consent to our union."

"Drive away those foolish fears, Isoldina; for know, little desponding one, that thy mother's scruples, when opposed by royalty, will soon give way. The word royalty has surprised thee—but I have the king's promise to interest himself in our behalf, and thy mother cannot gainsay the wishes of her foster child, whom she loves as though he were her own."

"She does, indeed," replied Isoldina; "and I sometimes think even more than her own; but why does the king interest himself for us, Gaetano? I thought he cared for naught but feasting with his noisy followers."

"I saved his life," was the rejoinder, while the youth's

brow flushed deeply, as he recounted his own exploit. "Not many mornings since, the Count Capanno was invited to join the king in the chase, and I went with him in my office of squire. The hunt was long and weary, and Andreas, in the excitement of the chase, wandered from the nobles, and came upon the boar alone and unattended. The animal, having received several wounds, was furious, and already had the king's mantle in his teeth, snapping and growling at a fearful rate, when I rode up, and, with my help, he soon dispatched the enemy. His face was deadly pale, and he looked hastily around to see that none of the nobles were near; but they had fortunately gone in another direction, being led off by a wrong scent. I say fortunately now, for the king was too much overcome to be master of himself, and cared not that any should see his weakness. His voice was low and hoarse, as laying his hand on my shoulder he whispered: 'Speak! what wilt thou have? Ask anything and it shall be thine—for thou hast not only saved my life, but my *honor!*' And then he laughed strangely, while his frame still shook with overpowering emotion. I remained silent, gazing upon him, I suppose, in utter consternation; for again turning to me, he exclaimed: 'Tell me, who art thou?' I replied that I was squire to the Count Giacomo Capanno, grand marshal of the kingdom. 'Have we not heard some wondrous tale of thy prowess?' asked the royal questioner, placing his hand to his brow, as though trying to recollect some half-forgotten story. 'Didst thou not once rescue our fair foster-sister from a perilous situation? The name sounds familiar.' I replied in the affirmative, and he continued: 'We have heard of thee, good youth, and, also, that thou didst not receive the reward so well merited—but if we move the kingdom in thy behalf, thou shalt yet receive thy bride. Depend upon the word of Andreas, and doubt not.' The tramp of horses was now plainly heard, and as the nobles joined him, I fell back into the rear of my master. I do not repeat this as idle vaunting, fair Isoldina, but to assuage thy doubts; for now that the king is on our side, there is a sure chance of success."

"I cannot suspect thee of vain boasting, Gaetano," was the reply; "the recollection of that terrible night is still fresh in

my memory, and I then witnessed sufficient to know that, in any case of danger, thy arm would never be idle."

The brave young squire, far from praising himself, had not, indeed, done himself sufficient justice; for, instead of affording any help in the terrible emergency, Andreas was so incapacitated by fear as to be incapable of making the slightest effort. Gaetano thus exposed himself to what seemed certain death; and the young king, trembling for the effect which the spectacle of his cowardice might have produced upon the proud nobles, smarting under their sovereign's disgrace, felt that he owed more than life to the Italian youth. But for the interference of Father Roberto, his plans of gratitude would have been carried out; now, however, the designing monk regarded Gaetano as a rival and an enemy—a feeling of which the object was happily unconscious.

They walked on, and both became lost in a reverie upon the future; but, Isoldina's thoughts would seem to be sad ones still, for, as though unconsciously, she heaved a deep sigh.

"Why that sigh, Isoldina?" inquired her companion. "Still doubting? Wilt thou never be convinced?"

"Did I sigh?" replied the maiden. "It may be wrong to damp thy rising hopes, but would not the king have already shown his gratitude, had he so intended? Had he told her that he approved not this opposition, thinkest thou, Gaetano, that my mother would have commanded me to give up all thoughts of our union?"

The young squire was somewhat perplexed by this question, and felt himself at a loss to account for it; but, at length, the bright expression returned to his countenance as he replied: "He may not yet have had the opportunity, or have felt in the humor to do so; kings are not always at leisure, neither are they always inclined to make use of that leisure for the benefit of others. A feast, or a hawking excursion may have driven the subject from his mind for the present—but, still, I depend on the word of the king."

"I hope this may not be mere illusion," returned the maiden, "but the friar, Father Roberto—"

"Now, Isoldina," exclaimed the impatient squire, with a laugh, "thou art the fairest, as well as the most provoking of human beings! I have told thee again and again of fair

grounds for hope, and thou dost continually throw my well-built castles to the ground. Prithee let the friar alone!—no good comes of meddling with such commodities; leave the Hungarian—"

The term about to follow, probably not a very gentle one, was suddenly cut short by the deep blush that suffused the face of Isoldina; the young girl often had occasion to blush for her countrymen, and Gaetano, respecting her feelings, mentioned the subject no more.

But while the lovers still walked on, deluding themselves with hopes bright but fleeting, a scene of a very different nature was taking place in another part of the grounds. Although Isolda, during the fearful night on which Gaetano perilled his life for her daughter, experienced the full force of a mother's gratitude, and fully resolved to perform the promise then made, yet as time and other events banished the vividness of the danger, all her old scruples returned; and, she could not bring herself to bestow Isoldina upon an Italian—an enemy of her countrymen, and one who must naturally be opposed to her foster son. Therefore, far from favoring their attachment, she took every means to thwart it; and although she perceived with pain, the deeply-cherished passion of Isoldina, she resolved, if possible, to unite her to an Hungarian. The reproachful glances of Gaetano that seemed to read her very soul, often provoked her beyond endurance; she felt that she had wronged him, and her eye turned from him as from an unpleasant object. She had seen the lovers enter the shaded walk, had marked their loving confidence, and with eyes flashing angrily at this opposition to her wishes, determined to follow them and explain her intentions; thus cutting off all hopes for the future.

Scarcely had she turned to fill this resolve, ere the sound of voices struck upon her ear in a subdued tone—and voices, too, that were quite familiar. Instantly the former feeling was swallowed up in another of greater moment, and one that seemed to demand more imperious attention. She had lately overheard muttered oaths and whispered vengeance directed against the king, Father Roberto, and the Hungarian party; and had also been bewildered by rumors of secret meetings and embryo conspiracies. Valuing the life of her foster son above all that earth contained, she was unwearying in her assiduity to dis-

cover and expose these suspected plots, but had never succeeded in her design. Regarding the Italians as a designing, poisoning race, always brooding over dark and fearful schemes of revenge, Isolda was ever on the *qui vive* for some terrible catastrophe. The voices she now recognised were those of the grand marshal, Count Capanno, and Count Carlo d'Artugio, a natural son of the late King Robert. The grand marshal she knew to be fierce, implacable, and impatient of any restraint; a character ill-calculated to submit to the encroachments of the usurping Hungarians. The Count d'Artugio, proud of the noble blood within his veins, kept his eye fixed upon the throne of Naples, as the goal that was to crown all his brilliant schemes. Although not sufficiently brutal and lost to all sense of feeling as to desire the death of the gentle young queen, he could easily perceive what was plainly apparent to all—that the kingdom was governed by the intriguing friar and his Hungarians, and that Joanna was queen in name only. That the foreigner Andreas, and his riotous followers should obtain precedence of one who boasted his alliance to the blood royal, galled the proud spirit of d'Artugio; and he readily lent himself to any scheme of revenge that, besides being a general deliverance, would serve to gratify his personal hatred.

Isolda, pale and trembling with indignation, cautiously advanced; and concealing herself behind a thicket of leaves, listened in agonising suspense. The blossoms of the passion-vine against which she leaned quivered and trembled with the tumultuous beatings of her heart, and the slender plant swayed and bent beneath the convulsive clinging of her form—almost borne to the ground with the heavy weight.

"The villainous friar!" exclaimed the grand marshal, as if in answer to some communication of his companion. "'Twas only yesterday that he insulted me past endurance under cover of his pretended sanctity. The grovelling, canting hypocrite! By the holy Mass! d'Artugio, 'twere a noble achievement to rid Naples of this pest!"

"Hush!" repeated the more cautious count, "A noise as of some one moving even now fell upon mine ear. Inscribe your hatred upon your shield, Capanno—warn all the prying Hungarians—as well write it upon every feature of your face, as to hold forth thus upon the subject in the palace gardens, where every tree seems gifted with ears, and each shrub

to possess the power of malicious tongues. People may hate about a palace, but they must keep their hatred to themselves —not breathe it to every idle wind, whose returning breeze will bear the record where it should not be borne."

The fiery passions of the Italian marshal plunged and reared under this restrictive curb; and muttering an impatient oath at the caution of his companion, he lowered his voice so that Isolda found it difficult always to catch his meaning. But her hearing was sharpened by fear and apprehension, and very few words escaped her.

"Ere long," continued the grand marshal, "the court moves to Aversa, to tarry there till the coronation. A bull is even now on its way from the Pope, to invest Andreas with the dignity of king—a pretty sovereign, truly, for this fair kingdom of Naples! And then, d'Artugio, we again start for the Apennines—'twill be high time for the last scene of the tragedy."

"For the Apennines?" rejoined the count. "Did we not, at our last conclave, agree to meet Caffarello and Napoli, with the others, at the islet in the gulf, as being a fitting and secret place for undisturbed conference? What hath now changed thy intention?"

"Ha!" replied the marshal, with a low laugh. "With all thy preaching of prudence to others, d'Artugio, thou hast yet to learn it thyself. According to thine own words, I might as well blazon our whole scheme abroad as to intrust it to listening ears within the royal precincts. Know, then, short-sighted man, that the marshal Capanno, with a few choice friends, goes to pass some short time at his mountain castle among the Apennines. This story will sound rather better at court than the rumor that the worthy marshal had galloped off with a small band, none knew whither, but it was strongly suspected to do some grievous mischief. An army can seldom be conquered by the sudden approach of the enemy, if well apprised of this approach before: all depends upon the secresy of the thing, and the intruders are far more likely to depart, overwhelmed by the fate which they would have assigned to others. The Count Capanno does, indeed, go to his castle for a *short* time—a much shorter time, even, than is supposed; and, having put our enemies upon the wrong track, what is easier than to retrace our steps, and take the road to the Castle? The Chatelaine being old, and in but partial possession of his senses, will

ask no questions; and during the conference our squires can amuse themselves as they choose."

"But will not the squires themselves be anxious to penetrate our secret?" inquired the count. "'Twere better, methinks, to leave them behind, and not increase our numbers too much."

"I tell thee, d'Artugio, thou art but a croaking fool, despite thy assumed prudence!" rejoined the fierce marshal. "Leave the squires behind! and a pretty figure we nobles of the realm should cut, riding unattended like the veriest peasants! That of itself were sufficient to arouse suspicion. No, no—we must take the squires with us. They will neither care about knowing our secret, or knowing, care to divulge it, being Italians. Should any of them play me false—"

Here the noble grasped his half-sheathed dagger, and the look that crossed his features was all-expressive. The two confederates lingered not much longer, and to avoid all suspicion approached the palace by different paths.

Although Isolda was still uninformed as to the object of this plot, she was now convinced that a plot existed; and a fearful, horrible foreboding crossed her mind, that pointed but too truly at its probable issue. What was now to be done? For a few moments she stood and reflected. The pure, cold moon looked brightly down from its studded throne, but the scene calmed not the wild heavings of her bosom. The flying hours but increased her agony and despair; and scarcely knowing what she did, she resolved to inform Andreas of her suspicions, and put him upon his guard. For this purpose she left the garden, and proceeded in search of him.

Isolda soon entered a lofty saloon, where, as she expected, she found the object of her solicitude. Andreas sat half-reclining upon a couch, rather overcome both with recent dissipation and a strife of words with Father Roberto. The nurse glanced around the apartment, and discovered to her delight that the Hungarians had betaken themselves to other quarters for the present, thus affording her a better opportunity of delivering her admonition. The king apparently neither heard her footsteps, nor was aware of her presence; and with something like a sigh, Isolda, with familiar affection, placed her arm around him, and raised her foster-son from his recumbent position. She smoothed the hair from his brow as a mother

would that of her child, and attempted to arrange his disordered attire.

"What now?" demanded Andreas half angrily, as he was aroused from his stupor. "Who breaks thus upon my privacy?"

"Only me, my prince," replied Isolda. "I wished to obtain speech of you in secret."

"Is it you, mother?" said the king, as he recognised his nurse. "What has brought you hither?"

"I came to warn you, and place you upon your guard; there are those around you who would seek your life."

"Seek our life!" exclaimed Andreas. "What old woman's fancy is this? Who would dare lift their hands against our life? Nay, mother, you have been surely dreaming, and not being yet quite awake, come to enlighten us on the subject of your visions. It will not do, good mother."

Isolda could scarcely restrain her anger at this heedless disregard of her warning, while she replied: "I have just overheard a plot, dark and fearful in its nature, and from the lips of two of your greatest enemies. I could not gather its exact purport, but I heard enough to know that they seek your downfall, if not your life."

"What! eavesdropping, good mother?" said the careless youth, with a laugh. "Truly, that acquirement seems inherent in those who throng a palace. But keep these conspiracies to thyself—I fear them not. The plot the worthy barons meditated was, doubtless, a rare chase without the drawback of our supervision. They would have all the game to themselves; but, by the mass! we'll be even with them yet!"

Andreas, having now employed his thoughts in the pleasures of the chase, could think of nothing else; and Isolda was obliged to depart, without having produced the least impression by her warning. Where could she now turn for assistance?

Again she sought the shaded walks of the garden; and, as she passed along, the subdued tones of Isoldina fell upon her ear, and then the manly voice of Gaetano was heard in reply. A sudden thought rushed across her brain, and usurped the place of momentary anger. The imperious marshal had announced his determination that they should proceed to the

castle, attended by their squires; and might not Gaetano, therefore, contrive to listen to this important discussion, and unfold to her the brooding plot? He had already given sufficient evidence of the power of Isoldina's charms, and might they not tempt him to play the spy upon his master? It was a cheerful, brightening gleam, and Isolda clasped it to her bosom as an angel-visitant. As she approached the lovers, she heard Isoldina say:

"Farewell, Gaetano—follow me not to the palace, for I fear that I have already done wrong in meeting thee here, and I would not face my mother's anger."

Isolda waited until the maiden had disappeared, and then approached the young squire, who colored deeply as though detected in some flagrant act. The nurse's countenance wore an unwonted smile as she asked Gaetano why he loitered there so late; an inquiry which only increased his confusion.

"Young man, dost thou love my daughter?" said Isolda at length.

Gaetano thought she trifled with his love; and regarded the question as little less than an insult, after the wrong she had inflicted. He, therefore, remained silent—but his eye glowed proudly, and there Isolda read her answer.

"I know," replied she: "I know that thou dost love her; I have heard it from thy lips—seen it in thine actions—read it in thine eye. But dost thou love her with a love passing all things earthly?—love her as she should be loved? Wouldst be willing to undertake a mighty and perilous deed for her sake?"

"I have already done that," replied the young squire, moved to anger by the inquiry, which seemed to infer that Isolda had forgotten the deed which should have won him his bride. "I have already done that—and though willing to risk my life a thousand times for her dear sake, I am *not* willing to submit to fraud and wrong; and, therefore, woman, from thee I demand Isoldina—my love, my bride!"

Isolda noticed not his passionate adjuration, and, after pondering for some time, continued: "Listen to me, Gaetano—I am about to unfold a tale of horror, a dark and fearful one, which has been brooding in my mind for some time. There is a conspiracy afloat to murder the king."

"To murder the *king!*" ejaculated the young Italian,

while he grasped her arm as though to prevent her escape. "Woman, how knowest thou this?"

"I have long suspected your master, and some other powerful barons, and this night I overheard a confirmation of my suspicions. Although they declared not, in so many words, their intention to murder the king, they indulged themselves in slanderous remarks, expressed their hatred of Father Roberto, and their desire for revenge, and spoke of some weighty conspiracy that must not be breathed within the precincts of the palace."

Gaetano was lost in astonishment and horror as the nurse proceeded, and vague, indistinct remembrances floated through his own brain; but the young squire was too noble and generous in disposition, to entertain what he deemed unjust suspicions of others; and recovering himself, he exclaimed:

"It is false! Never would my honorable lord play such a scurvy trick! He may be fierce and implacable, though he has ever been kind to me; but to conspire against the honor and life of his sovereign—never! Thy zeal hath misled thee."

"Nevertheless," replied Isolda, "'tis even as I have said. We love not so well to hear of fearful plots, that we must imagine them where they do not exist; and plainly as I see and hear thee at this moment, Gaetano, did I hear thy treacherous master appoint a secret meeting with the Count d'Artugio. There is a way to remove thy doubts."

"Now, this passes belief!" exclaimed Gaetano. "That my lord Capanno should be the instrument of so foul and dark a deed! I can never believe it, unless I hear it with mine own ears."

"That thou canst speedily do; the murdering baron proceeds to his mountain castle under pretence of a change of air, accompanied by his squire. 'Tis easy to divine the motive of this visit—indeed, he himself observed: 'Twas high time for the last scene of the tragedy.' Conceal thyself near them, learn this secret, and then return to be hailed as the savior of thy sovereign's life, and the husband of Isoldina!"

"Woman! Fiend!" exclaimed the youth, as the indignant blood suffused his very brow. "Darest thou hold out a temptation to me to sully the name of squire for ever—betray my master's secrets—and become a vile, dishonored thing?

I tell thee, the fancy exists but in thine own unsettled brain; and never will I become the mean, crawling viper thou wouldst have me! Rather perish sovereign, bride, all! than that I should be this thing to point at—to have my name branded in my country's annals as *Infamous!* Away! tempt me not!"

"I tell thee, hot-headed youth," retorted Isolda, "that what I heard was *not* a sleeping vision, but earnest, breathing, fearful reality! Thou wilt soon drive my mind to frenzy by these ridiculous notions of honor! *Honor!* Is it honor, thinkest thou, to see thy sovereign basely murdered, without an effort for his deliverance, and all to save a deep-dyed villain from the hands of the law? Prithee, master squire, since thy honor is so squeamish, I'll e'en make a compact with thee; learn the purport of this secret conference, and if it proves to be what I have good reason to suppose it, I can place the king and court upon the defensive, and thus render the schemes of the conspirators fruitless—while I swear by the Blessed Virgin that thy master's name shall never be divulged, or, if that is beyond my power, I promise to favor his escape. See! I am pressing my lips to the holy cross in token of my faith. On thy return, the hand of Isoldina shall reward thy services—but if thou doest it not, never shall my daughter be thine! Remind me not of former promises! What are promises, vows, all, compared to the anguish of this moment? Choose!—on the one side are love and honor; on the other a dark, brooding shadow, which thou canst never dispel—it will always call up the remembrance of thy crime!"

"Isolda! Isolda!" gasped the Italian youth; "here, on my bended knees, I beseech you have pity upon me! Ask me to stem the raging flood—to brave the dagger's point—to breathe the dungeon's fetid air, and I will do it cheerfully for Isoldina. But, oh! ask me not to betray my master's secrets—like a treacherous reptile, to sting the hand that caresses me; ask my life, but not my *honor!* Read the lines upon my face, as the moonlight falls upon it; they will tell you that it is not cowardice, not a base shrinking from a dangerous enterprise—it is a conflict of the soul with the passions! Spare me, Isolda!"

With eye burning with a clear inward light, cheek pale with

high-born emotion, and the stamp of a noble mind impressed upon his brow, the young supplicant, with his clasped hands and kneeling attitude, presented a picture at once beautiful and touching.

But Isolda was resolved; and with a calm, haughty smile she said, as she turned from the youth: "Never dare to bestow another thought upon Isoldina! Ere another month elapses she will be the bride of Oscar; *he* is no treacherous Italian!"

She walked proudly and quietly to the end of the path, but stopped as Gaetano, in despairing tones, exclaimed:

"Stay, Isolda, stay! Yes," said he to himself, "I am about to sell myself to infamy and dishonor—to blot my hitherto stainless name—to become a traitor, a spy! Oh, love! love! For thee do we venture everything! Listen, Isolda; I promise to discover the subject of their conference, and if a criminal plot, to give you notice of the conspiracy, and prevent it if possible. But I will betray no more of my master's secrets; and if this be but a waking fancy, and by this base means I obtain my lord's confidence without accomplishing any good end, I can return to die—die under the crushing weight of shame I shall have drawn upon myself!"

"Swear," said Isolda, solemnly, "swear to me upon this sacred cross, as I have sworn to you, that you will be true to your promise!"

Gaetano shuddered as he held it to his lips, and thus delivered himself up to a course of mean duplicity. Isolda had now attained her purpose; and gliding quickly through the paths, she left the unhappy youth to his torturing reflections.

CHAPTER IX.

Vivaldi sat for some time as though lost in thought—he was astonished at the firm composure of his companion; familiarity with guilt destroys the horrid appearance which is flung around it to guard it from contact, but it was not the crime itself which stunned him as it were—for he would willingly have connived at the death of Father Roberto—but its nature and extent. It was both sudden and unexpected; to plan the murder of the king seemed a bold stroke for liberty, and for a time he was startled by the proposal. His companion remained gazing upon him, almost repenting the haste which had placed their secret in possession of one who seemed so wavering and undecided. But the more Vivaldi reflected upon this scheme, the less startling and impracticable did it become; and at length it seemed to him the only means by which Naples could be relieved from the miseries under which she groaned.

"I fear," replied the goldsmith, at length, "that our plan is more likely to meet with defeat than success—but never shall it be said that Matteo Vivaldi refused to lend his aid in behalf of his country. I swear," continued he solemnly, and with a truth and earnestness worthy a better purpose, "I swear that heart and hand I will be with you; if victory is ours together we will rejoice—and should the torture herald in an ignominious death, never will I flinch or swerve from my purpose."

The young noble unsheathed his sword, and pressing his lips to the jewelled cross on its hilt, pledged himself to his companion in the same solemn manner.

There is something fearful in the idea of two men thus calmly and deliberately vowing themselves to the perpetration of a terrible crime, but it must be remembered that the age in which they lived was a rude one; in the fourteenth century the assassin's dirk was a more common way of settling grievances—and their grievances were many. To see the wild, un-

tutored Hungarians, total aliens to their country and interests, seize upon, and confiscate to their own use, the finest Neapolitan provinces—to behold them reigning supreme at the court of their native city, while *their* influence was daily weakened and their wrongs unredressed, was too severe a trial for Italian patience. Those whose wrongs were more glaring, whose hatred and desire for revenge more deep and burning, congregated together and brooded over their common subject of complaint. Such tools in the hands of skilful leaders were indeed efficient; looking steadfastly to the end they wavered not.

Vivaldi's companion returned his sword to its sheath, saying: "I would, Vivaldi, that there were a closer bond between us; Could I hope to gain her affections, I would ask your daughter's hand as the seal to our compact."

These words were spoken with the confident tone used by a noble to a plebeian goldsmith, whom he considers honored by his choice. In truth, the young Beltrame had deliberated with himself for some time before making this proposal; for he inherited all the pride of his father, the Count d'Artugio, and that pride at first revolted from the thoughts of a union with the goldsmith's daughter; but Vivaldi, he knew, possessed immense wealth, and the purses of the Italian nobility were then rather low; and furthermore, he had caught a glimpse of the sweet face that graced the mysterious apartment.

Vivaldi's countenance betokened pleasure thus to see his dearest wishes gratified; and he was about to reply, when suddenly a voice, thrilling in its deep earnestness, exclaimed:

"Beatrice Vivaldi scorns the hand, noble though it may be, that would come to her stained with the blood of a fellow-creature! Never will she degrade herself so far as to become the tool of so base a purpose!"

Then sinking at the feet of Vivaldi, she sobbed forth: "O! my father! recall that fearful vow! Bind not yourself to the performance of that which, consider it as you will, is still a crime, and doubly so when perpetrated against your sovereign, whom you are bound to honor and obey!—Do not cause a daughter to blush for a father's memory!"

The silken curtains that shut her from the view of those without the chamber, had not been sufficient to keep from Beatrice the agonizing knowledge of her father's connection with plans of criminal revenge. As the first whispered words fell

upon her ear, the young girl, almost suspending her breath, listened till all was unfolded; and then sat motionless, like one who has drawn upon himself a heavy weight of which it is impossible to be freed. But her own name was coupled with this tale of villainy—*her* hand was the goal to be waded for through a sea of blood; and, inspired with a noble courage, the timid girl fixed her clear, unclouded gaze upon the two conspirators, causing them for the moment to see their meditated crime in its true light. She stood before them like a spirit of good descended from its celestial sphere, to cast a shadow of its own brightness upon the haunts of crime, and point upwards to the never-changing light. Her eyes had deepened in their hue, and the rich glow on her cheek, while the heart beat almost audibly beneath its white silk robe. Never had the Neapolitan noble beheld so perfect a vision of beauty; even as he quailed beneath that glance, he worshipped the sun whose brightness dazzled him.

Vivaldi's pale features worked with anger, as he saw her whom he had so carefully guarded from contamination a witness of their guilt—a spy upon their actions. The father wished not to be lessened in the eyes of his daughter; he knew her purity, her innocence of heart; from childhood she had been as a thing apart from common griefs or joys; immured in her gilded prison-house, she had looked upon him as the sun of her existence, and he could not bear to have the idol thus rudely hurled from its pedestal.

"Beatrice," said Vivaldi, sternly, as he recovered from his first surprise and consternation; "Beatrice, I little dreamed that the child whom I have so fondly reared would play the spy upon her father—become mistress of his secret by such unworthy means. But go now and finish the good work you have begun; denounce Vivaldi the conspirator, and behold a father die by his daughter's hand. And for this I have loved," continued he bitterly, "for this I have worshipped as an idol the daughter who thus repays my blind love!"

Young as Beatrice was, and unused to reasoning, she quickly perceived that her father avoided the subject, and skilfully endeavored to turn her thoughts elsewhere; to enlist her feelings, and arouse her filial affection, by bringing forward vivid pictures of a father's love. He treated her as a spoiled child—not as a feeling woman; and Vivaldi soon discovered

that he dealt with one who was a match, at least, in intellect, although her powers had never been called forth by scheming and arguing.

"My father," she replied, while the tears started to her eyes, "reproach me, rebuke me, as you will, for what was in itself a wrong act, but may be the means of preventing a terrible crime. I would," continued Beatrice, "steadfastly, and without shrinking, hold this hand in a fiery blaze until no trace of it remained, could the sacrifice rescue from death or misery my only parent—my more than father! But though I could do this, I cannot and will not lend it to a scheme both criminal and revolting; one which chills my very blood to dwell upon! There are other ties which religion and a sense of right impose upon us; we have the power within us of distinguishing between good and evil—there is a still small voice that will not be hushed, and when we see others on the brink of a fearful precipice, we must warn them ere it be too late."

"But not," replied the goldsmith impatiently, "until it is discovered whether the cause of this dangerous position be ignorance of its danger, or a wish to rescue others who have already missed their footing, and are falling. This is all very well, Beatrice, and reasoned like a true woman; but you are in the position of one who has found a valuable casket without the means of opening it—you have discovered the effect without the cause. You have been carefully nurtured in ignorance of the world with its cares, its short-lived pleasures, and its desperate schemes, to obtain those very pleasures that vanish in the grasp, like a precious jewel which one has travelled, and searched, and toiled for; and, lo! in turning it to the light, it is but a bit of painted glass! Yearn not for this knowledge, for it brings with it its own bitterness; think you not that the shifting scenes of a glorious picture are far more enjoyed by those who see only its resplendent beauties, dim and uncertain from a distance, than by those who regulate the coarse machinery, and obtain, with a nearer view, a sight also of the wheels and wood behind? You have never heard, girl, of oppression, and wrongs, and insults that wring the very heart-strings—but you *have* heard of a desperate effort to break from the goading bondage, and hearing, you de-

nounce the victims of fraud and injustice as a band of thirsty murderers."

Beatrice was almost bewildered by this flow of spurious reasoning; Vivaldi had received an education far above his rank—study had been his delight from childhood, and many a time would he leave the uncompleted task, to pore over some half-effaced scroll. These varied metaphors and allusions were so many puzzles to the straight-forward mind of the young girl; and she had but truth, and a consciousness of the right, to support her. Meantime, the lines of passionate anger smoothed, and a tear glittered in the eye of Vivaldi; Beatrice, seizing the propitious moment, continued:

"I mean not, dear father, to reproach the tenderness of that love, which, while it guards the beloved object from all shadow of harm, renders it less able to endure the life-storms that must inevitably assail it. This is no time to fold the hands, and selfishly consider the best means of escaping from dangers with which others are threatened. Women are not mere exotic plants, whom every wind would seem to visit too roughly; they have allotted to them the character of counsellor, friend, and sympathizer—and a soul which tells them that existence has an aim. Conscience whispers sadly that I have hitherto lived in name only—that I have selfishly closed my ears, and blinded my eyes to the trials and struggles of those around me; self has been the centre-point towards which every thought and feeling has tended, but, henceforth, I will live for others. You spoke, dear father, of insults and wrongs—these are harrowing, indeed, eating like a canker into the very heart; but can they justify an act which I blush to mention?—one which the laws of God and man alike forbid? Can they atone for *murder*?"

Vivaldi was thrilled by the deep earnestness of the speaker's tone, *almost* turned from his purpose; but, while the young monitress stood on one side as an angel of peace, on the other rose up the oppressions and wrongs of years, like a dark shadow coming between him and that gentle influence—and he was vanquished, but not by the *right*. What could she know of right and wrong?—of means justified by an end?—she, who had spent all her life with her cross and prayer-book, and to whom, therefore, those who were not saints like herself were necessarily emissaries of the

evil one? The only penance would be a heavier sum for absolution, and the crime (if crime it were) was washed from his soul.

"Beatrice," replied Vivaldi, at length, "I have already told you of wrongs which we can no longer suffer—of crimes unblushingly committed—of the innocent punished for the guilty, and still you refuse to be convinced. This is not a mere assassin's plot with a well-bribed tool to perform his bidding; it is a rising of desperate men—a bursting forth of that smothered wrath which will *not* be kept down—blood only can extinguish the flames, and the blood, not of the *innocent*, but of the *guilty*. Go and reason with these desperate men—tell *them* of crimes and fearful retribution, and see how they will answer you! Is it a mean, servile effort, think you, to rescue our country from the bondage in which it is held—to rid the kingdom of its swarm of plunderers, and restore to Naples its golden age?"

Vivaldi, like many other reasoners, possessed the power of deceiving himself with his own reasoning; his eyes flashed brilliantly, and the glow of enthusiasm mantled in his face as he proceeded deluding himself with the belief that virtue alone, pure sterling virtue, inspired him to act and speak thus.

Beatrice listened to her father, scarcely breathing till he had concluded—every word fell upon her ear, and then her eye, with its stern beautiful spirit, calmly confronted him, as she asked the simple question:

"Father, is it right?"

"Return to your chamber," said Vivaldi, speaking low and strangely, for he asked himself if this high-minded, fearless woman could indeed be the timid girl who never raised her eyes to any countenance but his; and the thought troubled him; for, she seemed not like herself, and he *feared* her. "Return, Beatrice, but we part not in anger; you have done your utmost to save your father from fancied infamy, and I thank you; but call it not by so harsh a name—regard it rather as a meritorious act by which a man sacrifices his feelings and inclinations for the good of his country."

He lifted the crimson curtains, and Beatrice passed into the lonely apartment, conscious that she had been vanquished by the force of words—not by the truth of argument.

A dark shadow had fallen and dimmed the sunshine of her path—she gazed around bewildered; the flowers had lost their

brilliant colors, and were now withered useless things—the soft rose tint had faded, and the hangings seemed crumbling to decay—the birds poured forth their songs, but the tones were harsh and grated on her ear. Why were things thus changed? She glanced in the large mirror whose depths seemed receding farther and farther into a deep mist; but it showed a pale, haggard face from which all trace of sunshine had vanished. The young girl shuddered as she thought of magicians and those charmed mirrors that reflect pictures of events yet to happen. Three scenes which passed rapidly before her inward eye, she almost saw pictured in the dim distance; first, a dark and fearful murder where figures moved with noiseless steps, and all was hushed and silent; they had disappeared, but presently her *father* came forward stained with the blood of the victim, and with a fearful, desperate look in his eyes. Then there was a long hall that seemed hung with black, while stern-looking men occupied the raised seats around, and pointed steadfastly to a criminal who, with bowed head and shaking limbs, seemed scarcely able to stand before them. A sudden shifting of light displayed the features of the doomed man—they were her *father's!* A scaffold rose gloomily before her; figures were moving about, and all seemed strange and confused—but in the midst of the crowd she saw one familiar face, and *he* was the victim!

Beatrice trembled and glanced fearfully around; hideous faces seemed looking out upon her from behind the hangings, and as a slight breeze stirred their heavy folds, she sank down before an image of the Virgin in a paroxysm of terror.

Long she remained upon her knees; but when the young girl arose, she sat calmly down, and with a firm determination put from her all these fancied terrors, and steadfastly turned her thoughts to the gloomy reality. What was to be done? Could she wilfully shut her eyes, and suffer a dark and fearful crime to proceed, without one effort to stop the stream of blood? She could not undo what she had done—could not put away the terrible secret, and be as though she had heard it not; no, a dark weight was pressing on her heart, and fearfully a voice seemed ringing in her ears, and crying: "Forever!" Then she must prevent it, even if she sacrificed all—her own hopes of happiness and the happiness of others? And Conscience answered "*Yes.*" But should she give up her father to justice—see

him dragged upon the scaffold—and, instead of receiving his blessing, hear him denounce the unnatural daughter as his murderer? And the Heart answered "*No!*"

What then could she do? She must prevent this murder, and yet not sacrifice her father. Then came a gleam of light, as she thought of arousing the fears of those nearest to the king, and thus putting them on their guard, under the promise of eternal secrecy, without committing her father. But how was this to be effected? There was a grand ball at the palace that night, in honor of the young sovereigns, who would depart the next day for Aversa, and there spend the interval that elapsed before the coronation, unconscious indeed of the danger that awaited them. To gain admittance under the security of a mask, and there warn some one of the most influential at court, flashed across the mind of Beatrice. She had heard her father speak of Philippa the Catanese, of her unbounded influence and devoted attachment to the queen; and to her she resolved to apply. The young girl listened at the entrance, and distinguished voices in earnest conversation; probably it was the Neapolitan, undermining by his pernicious counsels, the little good her own appeal had been able to effect. Her heart grew sick as she turned shudderingly away. Fortunately there was a door in her apartment communicating with the street, and for the first time in her life, she crept stealthily about to escape her father's vigilance, and trembled in the act like a detected criminal. Beatrice was naturally timid and retiring; but this was not a wild scheme for an evening's amusement—it was a question of life and death.

CHAPTER X.

BRIGHTLY gleamed the hundred lights that decorated the banquet-hall of the Castel Novo—bright and clear on jewels, velvets, and gorgeous brocade; and still the gleams changed not when they fell on want, and woe, and misery, as it gazed wonderingly on the golden flood, rendered still more brilliant and imposing by the darkness without. The building itself was a union of the beautiful with the stern and strong. The massive fortress frowned ill-success to all daring enough to attempt the scaling of its tremendous height; while the soft floods of light that seemed like a golden atmosphere—the breath of crushed flowers like the song of a broken heart into which all its sweetness is gathered, the sweeter still for being the last;—the tones of music that came soft and low as the tinkling of a fairy bell, or the murmur of a crystal fountain—all seemed to bewilder the senses, and send the imagination roaming to fairy land. The ceiling showed forth the most glowing scenes of Giotto—Italy's first restorer of that glorious art; and fragrant festoons of orange blossoms resting on the dark, glowing leaf, were looped up against the walls.

There was a soft, rushing murmur as of a gathered multitude—a low hum of human voices that rose and swelled upon the air, harmonious as the strings of a fine-toned instrument. *Royalty* was there, whose halo, like a spell, breathed upon the crowd: there were those, beneath whose glittering robes beat hearts thrilling with passion and revenge;—there were those who carried within their bosoms a deep and deadly hatred;—and there were those who, with the inward eye fixed steadfastly on a glittering mansion, where resided Fame, Honor and Wealth, regarded not the dark and fearful road of Crime, their only path to the gleaming goal. And yet all smiled alike—all wore the same smooth brow and untroubled mien.

Listen: there was once a gardener who worked among his flowers, and fancied that all were beautiful; the gorgeous Tulip, the sweet, gentle Violet, the stately Lily, and the fragrant

Jasmine, all were alike lovely, and he loved them all. But one morning a beautiful rose put forth its tender leaves, and the dew-drops nestled in its bosom, and the bees all gathered round it. The gardener, struck with its wondrous beauty, inhaled its fragrance, and loved it more than all. Then he went to the other plants, but alas! he found defects where he had looked for beauty. Some were fragrant and graceful, but others were coarse and gaudy—they were not like his rose. The gardener lay down among the trees and wept, and as he wept a beautiful dream came upon him: he thought that a fairy stood near and asked why his tears flowed? He replied that he wept because his plants were not as beautiful as his queenly rose. The fairy breathed upon his flowers, and lo! they were all roses. In delight he passed among them, admiring their beauties; but suddenly his rapture ceased; there stood the first, still queenly and conspicuous among the rest; *they* were roses in form only—they had not its fragrance but still retained their native scents. Then the boy went weeping to the fairy, and wanted his flowers made roses in perfume as well as in color. "That," replied the fairy, "is a heaven-born gift—'tis not in my power to bestow. And now, oh gardener! learn from the flowers a lesson of human life: when mortals wish to gain a desired end, they put on the semblance of Virtue, and clothe the brow with smiles, and teach the eyes to speak its language; but the *heart* is still the same;—tear off the veil that covers it, and it is still the human heart." The gardener awoke and pondered on what he had dreamed; his flowers were still the same, and his rose as bright as ever; but humbly and faithfully he watched them at even, nor cast them away because they were not all roses.

Gay masks were flitting about, and whispering strange secrets, that caused many a fair cheek to lose its brilliant hue, in turn, at the knowledge they revealed. There was Boccaccio, whose wit dazzled like a brilliant meteor, and the Princess Maria, his too celebrated Frainetta, at whose behest he called forth the most glowing powers of his imagination. All eyes were fixed upon them; but not disturbed by the general observation, they continued to laugh and jest, and exchange soft glances and lover-like compliments. They needed no disguise, it were ill-timed; and the glances that fell upon them were often accompanied by a smile.

But, like the fair, calm moon, whose rays fell refreshingly on the busy earth, seemed the young queen. No mask covered that brow of light; or hid the large, soft eyes and the mouth of heavenly sweetness. Like a seraph's was the lovely face, partly shaded by the pale, brown tresses, amid whose folds gleamed the jewelled coronet. A robe of white silk, falling low on the graceful bust, was fastened at the waist by a girdle studded with jewels that glowed with a rich, warm light; pearls looped up the hanging sleeves of rich lace, and clasped the rounded arms. A single lily formed of diamonds, with golden leaves, glittered upon her bosom, glowing with a sweet, steady light, like the heart that beat beneath it. Wherever she moved, the crowd gave way; it was as though an angel crossed their track; and some beams of that purity fell even on the hearts of those who knew it not; but the flame only served to make darkness more visible, and soon flickered and went out for want of proper nurture.

A stately figure glided among the crowd, whose full, sweeping robes and lofty person diffused around a certain respect. Philippa trod with the haughty step of a queen-dowager; none could have recognised the fisherman's daughter, except *one*, and she felt that his eyes were ever upon her.

Gleaming like a star among the courtly beauties was the young Sancha, Countess Terlizi. There was a proud, glorious beauty in those midnight eyes—a world of softness and of spirit—tears glancing through a flood of sunshine; there was pride in the small, rosy mouth, and finely-curved nostril; and a rare loveliness in the delicate coloring. Philippa gazed upon her with pride and admiration; *she* was not a fisherman's daughter, she was noble by two descents, and plainly showed it in the arched and commanding turn of the neck. And this was *her* grandchild—this thing of beauty she could call her own!

"Well, my masquerading queen," exclaimed a gentle voice, "what occupies thy thoughts?"

Philippa started, and dropped a lowly courtesy; she had not supposed the queen so near.

"I was gazing on a most perfect specimen of Nature's handiwork," replied the Catanese. "What is your majesty's opinion with respect to it?"

"Thy memory is but a short one," replied Joanna with a

smile, "seeing that we have already given thee our opinion numberless times on the same subject. Thou art enthusiastic, good countess, as well thou mayest be," continued the queen, following that fixed gaze, "for she is beautiful, Philippa, most beautiful. Softness and high-born beauty are mingled together in that lovely face."

Philippa, pleased, delighted, could have fallen down and worshipped her sovereign for these gentle, sympathizing words; in Joanna so much condescension and sweetness were mingled with so little pride—that is, the pride which tramples upon others.

There was an opening in the crowd, and two figures advanced towards them. Both were masked; but Philippa discovered, by instinct, in the gorgeous apparel of an Oriental vizier, the devoted monk, Father Roberto; Joanna recognised Andreas in the glittering robes of the Sultan who hung upon his arm. For what purpose the friar had assumed a character so little in keeping with his holy avocation, Philippa was unable to conjecture; but she resolved to watch him narrowly. For, passing the queen, the mask fell from the face of Andreas, and disclosed to Joanna the flushed and disordered face of her husband. He turned aside to avoid that gentle, reproving gaze; and, quick as thought, the queen had restored the mask to its place, without the accident being perceived. She blushed to have him discovered in such a state by her subjects, although convinced that he was more sinned against than sinning.

Father Roberto, secure in his disguise, imagined that none could penetrate his folds; but Joanna quickly saw through the ineffectual covering, and sighed as she reflected on that weakness which placed Andreas at the mercy of every designing follower. But Philippa had fixed a pitying, though respectful gaze upon her, as if waiting for her confidence; and the queen proudly kept within her own heart all disparaging thoughts of her husband, and would breathe naught against him.

"Look, Vizier!" exclaimed Andreas, "see yon fair countess —is she not most beautiful? Bright, glorious, and with that pretty consciousness of her own charms that but heightens them the more. See how proudly she curls her lip at that

coxcomb, Rafferti. She is the most beautiful star that graces the court."

"Most beauteous?" asked Father Roberto; "you forget the queen, with those love-lit eyes, and ravishing mouth, with—"

"Hold!" exclaimed the king, angrily, "name not Joanna thus—pollute not her name with such praises—remember she is thy *queen!*"

The abstemious friar was not apt to neglect the wine-cup at their nightly revels, and a deeper draught than usual must have unloosened his tongue; but even his insolence received a check from the unwonted dignity which accompanied these words.

Andreas, although he *could* be roused, as the friar had marked with surprise, cared not to extend his displeasure too far; and, after a short pause, again resumed the conversation:

"Is she not beautiful, Father? Mark but the graceful head, so proudly thrown back, the finely-turned throat, and those glorious, dreamy eyes!"

Father Roberto turned slowly and indifferently in the direction of the young countess, as he replied:

"She is indeed lovely, but the stain of low birth is, unfortunately, sufficient to prevent our noticing beauty that would otherwise receive its just due. Like a thick, impervious screen, or a single hasty touch bestowed upon what was before a splendid piece of workmanship, is that unfortunate origin; traced to a Catanese fisherman—a *serf!*"

The reply of Andreas, Philippa cared not to hear; struggling with her emotion, she turned quickly from the brilliant crowd and entered a small apartment, whose closely drawn screen rendered it a fitting place of solitude. Alone, secure from the gaze of inquiring eyes, she hastily drew off the mask that, during the moment which elapsed, had almost suffocated her; and, with a brilliant eye and flushed brow, threw herself upon the nearest couch. The jewelled tiara upon the noble hero, the full crimson robe with its border of ermine, and the blaze of gems upon arms and bosom, became a face and form that well represented the queen. *That* seemed nature; any other character would have been masquerading. But the brow was contracted into a fearful expression of rage—the dark orbs flashed—and the hands, as they gleamed white and pure from the velvet robe, were convulsively clenched.

It was a subject for an artist's pencil; the strong lights and shades, the rich, gorgeous coloring, and the vivid emotions which passed across that haughty face. All the hate of an Italian nature was concentrated into that single moment; the small fingers instinctively sought the jewelled dagger, and had the monk then appeared before her, a wild and fearful impulse might have hurried him into eternity. He had, with cunning and unerring aim, sent an arrow to rankle and fester where the wound could never heal; and that too when in the sunshine of the royal smiles the wrong would be most deeply felt. No other insult could have goaded the unhappy woman to such an excess of fury; despite her influence, her wealth, and her commanding person, she felt that she had not *that*—that she never could have. Nor jewels, nor kingdoms, nor royalty itself could purchase *that*—the unbought gift of capricious Nature. It was as though all the petty wrongs, the grievances which had assailed her from the proud nobility, rejoicing in their spotless lineage, had suddenly assumed a powerful, hideous shape, that now stood mocking before her.

She gnashed her teeth in utter abandonment; but this excess of fury was too violent to be lasting; and sinking down exhausted upon the couch, she buried her face among the cushions. Long she remained in this position, lost, dead to all around; while the deep, convulsive sobs that shook her whole frame, told of a heart broken, crushed, and hopeless. Yes! the proud, unbending woman was bowed lower than the very menials, who had often gazed so wonderingly upon her haughty splendor; and tears trickled through the slender fingers, but they were evidences of softened feelings—the cooling shower that follows the booming thunder and angry lightning.

A gentle, almost noiseless tread startled the Catanese; and looking up, she beheld immediately before her a mask, whose slight figure was enveloped in a large cloak. Hastily throwing back the long straying tresses which had escaped from the tiara and fallen over her face, while her color rose at being thus discovered, even though her intruder were but a menial, Philippa angrily exclaimed—

"Who comes here to disturb my privacy?"

"I would have speech of you, lady," exclaimed an almost unintelligible voice.

"Begone!" cried Philippa; "I want no more masquerading

secrets whispered in mine ear; carry thy wares to such as need them—I will have none of them. Dost hear me, insolent?" she continued, stamping her foot with rage. "Begone, I say!"

"Alas!" murmured the intruder, though the reply was almost choked with sobs. "Would that the secret I have to tell you were indeed but a courtly jest!"

The voice was evidently that of a female; and despite her anger, Philippa felt interested by the touching distress of the speaker's tone. She had fallen at her feet, and the Catanese replied, as she raised her from this humble attitude—

"I listen to no more secrets in disguise. Remove the mask, for if of weighty import, I would see whether the features be honest ones. Secrets and confessions are oftentimes snares to those who heed them."

She had already placed her hand upon the mask; the unknown strove to retain it, and in the struggle it fell off, disclosing a lovely face bathed in tears. Philippa, grieved that she had unwittingly caused this sorrow, expressed her concern.

"I readily forgive you, lady," replied her companion, "for you know not the cause of my unwillingness, and supposed it but a foolish jest. But oh!" continued she, wringing her hands, "how can I now disclose the fearful secret! All will be discovered!"

Philippa gazed inquiringly on the beautiful face before her, with its liquid blue eyes and shaded hair, so uncommon among the Italians; and bending down to the frightened girl, she whispered:

"You are the daughter of Vivaldi the goldsmith; I cannot be mistaken in that face, of which report has spoken so much. But do not be alarmed," continued the Catanese, as she noticed the burning cheeks and tearful eyes of Beatrice, "your secret is safe with me."

"Lady!" exclaimed Beatrice, with a wild earnestness that almost terrified her companion, "you have discovered by accident that which I would not for worlds have revealed; promise me by all your hopes of salvation hereafter, that you will never divulge to mortal what I am about to relate!"

Philippa gave the required promise, and bent her ear close to the young girl, while her countenance changed to an expression of horror as she learned the plot of the conspirators.

But no inducement could wring from Beatrice the names of those concerned in the meditated crime.

"You shall have wealth, girl!—wealth and honor shall be heaped upon your head, whisper but a single name!"

Beatrice replied not, but gazed at her companion with an earnest, searching glance, as she recalled her first impression of her who had been 'loaded with wealth and honor.' It was not an impression of happiness.

Philippa read the meaning of that look, and a feeling of self-loathing came over her; but still she clung madly to the jewelled cup, though she knew that it contained poison.

"Answer me one word," continued she,—"one single word, and I will forever bless you! Is the monk, Father Roberto, one of the conspirators?"

Hope once more illumined her countenance as Beatrice hesitated, fearful of some cunning cross-questioning by which she might be led to reveal more than she wished; but it soon changed to disappointment when the young girl replied in the negative.

"Every way he escapes me!" exclaimed Philippa, bitterly; "I would part with life itself for the sake of revenge!"

Beatrice shuddered at the expression of disappointed rage in her countenance, and gathering her cloak closely around her, she whispered:

"Remember your promise—let it be sacred, for on it you have periled your hopes of salvation!"

Ere Philippa could recover from the solemn warning, she was gone; and, replacing the cast-off mask, she again mingled with the crowd to begin her work of watchfulness.

But there had been an unknown listener to the conference; this was Father Roberto. The friar, aware of the feelings his remark would create, and anxious to watch the effect, had followed the Catanese as she emerged from the crowd, and, concealing himself behind the deep hangings, there, through an aperture, feasted his eyes with the sight of her emotion. But, not only this, he overheard the whole plot, and Philippa's disappointed hopes.

"One more line added to our score of reckoning," muttered he; "but I have thee now in my power, and this stolen secret shall be turned to some account. And so thou pantest for revenge?" he continued; "revenge is indeed sweet, and to

obtain it, I could almost wish that the fool, Andreas, might indeed become their victim."

The suspicions of Vivaldi now returned with tenfold power, and resolving to rouse the apathy of Andreas, he departed in search of him.

CHAPTER XI.

GAETANO, overcome by a sense of shame in thus yielding himself to ignominy, would have revoked the fatal vow as soon as uttered, but it was now too late. Two or three days passed, which were spent by the young squire in a state of great uneasiness. He resolved not to inform Isoldina of the fearful ordeal that must be gone through ere he could claim his bride; he shrank from lowering himself so far in her eyes, and thus he kept the secret locked in his own bosom.

Again they were together, fondly looking to the future, when one of the other squires, calling Gaetano, told him that his master was about to depart instantly for his castle in the Apennines.

"If thou valuest thine ears, good comrade," added the messenger, "make all the speed thou canst; for the grand marshal is in a fuming passion, calling down anathemas without number on the heads of those luckless squires who, being in the trammels of love, are not ready to fly to Spain or Russia at a moment's warning. The count Giacomo looks the very picture of thundering rage—he is not to my taste as a master."

"Hasten, Gaetano," exclaimed Isoldina in alarm, as the youth seemed disposed to linger, for well she knew that this was no false picture of the fiery Italian. "Hasten, do not stay a moment."

She turned her eyes upon his countenance, and was both surprised and terrified at the change which had passed over it. The cheeks were blanched as though with fear, the eyes wild and strained, and the lips quivering. Hastily seizing his arm, she had scarcely power to utter:

"Speak, Gaetano!—what aileth thee?"

The young man at length recovered; and, looking up, he beheld Isolda confronting him with a fixed and significant gaze, while her eye, as it glanced from him to Isoldina, expressed a language which he but too well understood. Rousing himself, he forced a smile as he replied to the maiden:

"'Tis nothing, Isoldina—a mere spasm, which has now quite vanished."

"By the holy cross!" exclaimed the messenger who had before summoned him; "if thou makest no more haste, my feet will be worn off in the service of love-sick squires! Why, man, dost thou know that a pleasant storm is brewing, and his Highness the Count Capanno, like a royal lion, roaring and growling at all whom he meets? I care not to monopolize thy deserts, master Gaetano, and pray thee to attend thy master without loss of time."

Away went the volatile squire; and Gaetano, pressing the hand which he held to his lips, breathed a hasty farewell, and with a lingering gaze, turned to join his master.

"I know not what it is," said Isoldina sadly, as she placed a small amulet round his neck, "that should rouse a presentiment of foreboding evil; but I fear, Gaetano, that our parting will be a long one. Preserve this amulet as thou wouldst guard thy life, and let it call to mind thoughts of home and Isoldina."

The uttered foreboding called up a corresponding feeling of sadness in the bosom of the youth; something seemed urging him to remain where he was, and not accompany the marshal; but Isolda, cautiously approaching, whispered in his ear:

"Remember the solemn oath pledged on the holy cross—fulfil that promise, or take the fearful consequences!"

The prisoner may writhe and struggle in his fetters, but it loosens not their heavy cords; and quickly turning from the spot, with a load like lead weighing upon his heart, Gaetano led forth his master's horse.

"A plague upon thee for thy dilatoriness, sir squire!" cried the grand marshal, as he vaulted into the saddle. "Thou hadst like to have spoiled—"

A warning look from the Count d'Artugio restrained him; and as that noble bent his eyes searchingly upon the youth's countenance, to ascertain if it expressed aught like suspicion, the squire unwillingly admitted a doubt of their intentions. Falling back into the rear, he rode thoughtfully along behind his master, wishing the office he was about to undertake had fallen on any other than himself; for Gaetano, with the natural distaste of a noble mind, recoiled from an act that would

unfold to him a dark picture of treachery—remove the veil, as it were, from a character which he had hitherto regarded as irreproachable; he wished not to become a spy upon his master.

With the ardor of a young, aspiring mind, he had long indulged in the visions of a pair of spurs and the honor of knighthood, to be attained by his own merits and unswerving honesty; he had even informed Isoldina of his hopes, and laughingly hailed her with the title of lady; for the grand marshal had praised his faithful services, and said that he *deserved* the honor of knighthood. Alas! how few are rewarded according to their deserts; but youth is ever disposed to build its hopes—perhaps, the hopes of a lifetime—upon a few kind words or a careless smile, which oftentimes is but the result of a self-complacency that vents its happiness on all around. Such visions *had* floated through the mind of the young Italian; they had formed the subject of his mighty dreams, mingled with the image of Isoldina coming towards him, like a bright-winged phantom, now *almost* within his grasp, but again lost to view in the distance, while now and then it would appear on the summit of a steep and dangerous mountain, mocking his efforts to attain it. But *now* these pleasant dreams could no longer be indulged in; he was about to blot his character by an act the most degraded, servile, and unknightly. A stained escutcheon reflects but little honor on its possessor, and he saw at once the overthrow of those brilliant hopes which had formed his daily musings. For the first time he regarded Isoldina's Hungarian birth as a misfortune; had she been an Italian, his honor would have remained unsullied. In spite of his momentary suspicion on joining the marshal, he could not yet bring himself to believe that the fancied conspiracy was other than the product of Isolda's fertile brain; had he supposed otherwise, his own sense of right and justice alone would have impelled him to perform an act from which his soul revolted.

They rode on; the two nobles continuing in close conversation, of which he was unable to gather the purport, even if he had been so inclined, for the tones were low and carefully guarded. But guilt is ever suspicious; and d'Artugio, seeing the young man so quiet and thoughtful, fancied that he might

be listening, and communicated his suspicions to the grand marshal.

Gaetano felt the warm blood rush into his face, as his master, slackening his pace, bestowed a single glance upon him, during which those dark, piercing eyes seemed to dive into his very heart, and read the thoughts that were written there. He could not reply with the proud look of conscious innocence; the shadow was upon him, and he felt this as the commencement of his degradation. He buried his face in his hands, and wept hot, scalding tears; while the grand marshal, as if satisfied by the investigation, bestowed no more notice upon his retainer.

Between Naples and Salerno, in the deep gorge of the mountains, rose the powerful castle, which formed the stronghold of the Italian count and his plotting friends. It was stern and gloomy, and the depression of the young squire increased as the ponderous gates were closed behind them. It seemed like the shutting out of hope and life; and mechanically he passed along with the others, and entered the fortress. But everything went on as it had done before; things proceeded in the quiet, natural manner which had characterized their former visits, and Gaetano again began to hope.

He was seated, buried in his reflections, in a small apartment that opened into his master's, when, about nightfall, he distinguished the sounds of loud knocking, and voices in altercation. Hastening to the single small window that admitted light into the chamber, he perceived a body of powerful barons from Apulia, fully mounted and attended by their squires; while at their head was the Count Tralizzo, in violent altercation with the porter, who appeared to be denying them admittance.

"What means all this?" exclaimed the deep voice of the grand marshal. "Villain! serf!" continued the haughty noble, darting a glance of fury upon his faithful servant, "why are my friends refused admittance? Is it consistent with the laws of hospitality to turn them from the castle on such a night as this, even were they strangers? Let down the drawbridge, instantly!"

"*Friends!*" muttered the porter. "I thought they had been enemies, coming in a body and so well equipped—strange looking friends, truly! The mighty baron had best look out,

with all his bravados, or he will draw a swarm about his ears, of which he would gladly be rid. The holy Virgin preserve us from harm."

The gates were unfastened, and Gaetano, as he watched them pass in, felt a revival of his suspicions. Soon after, one of the squires entered the room in quest of him, exclaiming :

"I thought I should find thee here, indulging in love-sick vagaries, but come instantly down to the banquet-hall ; we are wanted to serve the wine to our worshipful masters, and afterwards serve ourselves ; that is, if there be anything left to serve with—which is, at present, more than doubtful, for the mighty barons seem uneasy and quarrelsome, a sure sign that they are troubled with hunger ; or even if not hungry, they will eat all before them, for the sake of venting their anger on the unoffending viands. Something has gone amiss, for they hardly exchanged courtesies, but called loudly for wine—so loudly, that thou must have been deaf, even as the stone of yonder casement, not to have heard them here."

"To the banquet-hall !" said Gaetano, as if repeating his thoughts aloud. "To the banquet-hall ! I thought they would instantly have adjourned to private conference. There must be a plot, else why their numbers ?"

"A plot !" exclaimed his surprised companion. "Holy mother ! what is the man talking of ? Truly, Gaetano, thou hast secured thy share of the wine before venturing hither ; therefore, expect small mercy at the coming meal from those who have not fared so well. But what has put such thoughts into thy head, even supposing this to be the case ? People talk not in their wine, any more than in their dreams, of things which interest them not."

"I have not tasted wine," was the reply ; "but has no secret conspiracy reached thine ear, no rumor, or words which mean more than they would seem to imply ? Perhaps thy master dropped some discourse of the kind on the road—didst hear aught of the kind ?"

"Now, out upon thee for a false squire !" was the indignant exclamation. "Dost take me for a grovelling spy that would work himself into his master's secrets, even were there any to learn ? Thou knowest not Paulino Gabrella, to suppose him one so lost to all shame—I could never attach spurs to my boots after that ! For good truth, comrade, thy mind

must wander; and if not the wine, 'tis love, perhaps, that hath crazed thee. But come, Gaetano, our masters await us."

Such *would* have been *his* reply to an insinuation of this kind; but that time was now past, and with a feeling of self-humiliation, Gaetano followed his companion to the banquet-hall.

It was an immense, dimly-lighted apartment, fully in keeping with the gloomy exterior of the castle; and the uncertain shadows rendered even more fierce and swarthy the countenances of the stalwart barons. But though they seemed restless and uneasy, the squire could perceive no signs of a secret conspiracy; they wore the appearance of men who had been engaged in some fatiguing employment, and were resolved to banish all troubles in the wine-cup. But the Italians, though fond of the exciting beverage, never allowed themselves to be overcome by its influence; perhaps disdaining to put themselves on a level with the hard-drinking Hungarians.

Gaetano took the richly-chased goblet of pure gold, and having filled it with the sparkling liquid, advanced to present it to his master. But either from sudden emotion or a recollection of his former suspicions, his hand trembled and the wine flowed over the crimson velvet and gold embroidery that covered the limbs of the grand marshal.

"Is the cup poisoned, Gaetano?" cried the Count Giacomo. "I know not what motive could have prompted the act; but thy limbs shake, and thy usually honest countenance bears the impress of conscious guilt. Speak! let us hear the cause of this unwonted carelessness. The veriest page, in his first embroidered doublet, would have performed the office better."

The young squire, generally so clear and open, shrunk from the inquiring gazes that were bent upon his blushing countenance, and one of the barons facetiously remarked:

"The youth has the appearance of one whose mind is filled with other thoughts than those of sparkling wine—sparkling eyes, for instance."

The other nobles applauded this idea, and seemed to consider the supposed sentiments of Gaetano as common food for mirth; while his master replied:

"Now we think of it, good squire, that same cause delayed thy departure this morning, and thou hast been strange and

unlike thyself ever since. Thou art free to choose a bride if it so pleaseth thee, but rove not off to Hungary in quest of one."

This remark appeared to rouse the anger of the other barons, and several of them murmured: "He were no true Italian an' he did!"

Gaetano replied not to this badinage; and as he performed his duties felt thankful that any other cause than the right one had been assigned for his carelessness. In the meantime the night wore on, and Gaetano beheld the visitors seek their respective apartments without the looked-for conference. The squires followed their example, and even the troubled lover forgot his trials in a soothing slumber.

At an early hour the following morning, the squires received an order to get the horses in readiness to set out from the castle.

"This is strange," observed Paulino, "scarcely settled at the castle before we have notice to quit; but strange or not, 'tis the business of a good squire to obey his orders and ask no questions. So my tongue is henceforth mute. Hast recovered yet from last night's insanity, Gaetano? Whether love, wine, or what I know not, but if the fit is still upon thee, here is ample food for curiosity."

Gaetano was no less surprised at the sudden summons; and like one walking blindfolded, with a very confused notion of his destination, he again set forth with the grand marshal. To his great joy, the young squire perceived that the road was one which led to Naples, the same which they had travelled the day before; and casting off the suspicions that had weighed upon him like a nightmare, he gave himself up to the invigorating influence of renewed spirits, and the clear, bracing morning air. The Count Capanno had evidently wearied of his mountain residence, and was now returning to the court as speedily as possible.

But on approaching the end of the bay, his master called the attention of the other nobles to a little castle on an islet but a few paces from the shore. As Gaetano reined in his horse and stopped with the rest, the surrounding scenery burst full and glorious upon his view. The bay, with its clear, crystal ripples, sparkled like a bed of jewels amid the warm golden rays which descended from the morning sun, and fell

slantingly upon the dark, massive sides of the castle in the distance; the sky presented the clearest blue, interspersed with white, fleecy clouds; and the distant mountains were enveloped in a purple haze. They could discern a group of figures at the entrance of the castle; and the young man's heart was filled with fear and disappointment, as the grand marshal, pointing them out, spurred his horse to the greatest speed, and called upon the others to follow.

"In—in quick!" exclaimed the count Capanno, pointing to a boat which lay in readiness, while he himself seized the oars. "We must not lose a moment, for they await us."

With a vague presentiment, Gaetano felt for the amulet which had been so carefully placed there by the hand of love, and found that it still remained next his heart. With all the superstition of the times he pressed it to his lips, and felt some degree of safety in the possession of the sacred relic.

On sped the bark across the liquid waters, and a short time brought them to the castle. The nobles immediately entered and joined the party already there, while the squires assembled in a group to decide upon those who were to remain behind and take charge of the horses; and the others proceeded to the castle under the superintendence of the chatelaine, who, old and solitary as he was, welcomed their appearance as an agreeable variation in his monotonous life. Of the latter number was Gaetano, who, now convinced that the moment had come, lost no time to put his design into execution. In order to avoid suspicion, and also to draw from them any information they might chance to have obtained, he joined the party of squires, whom the chatelaine led immediately to the wine-cellar, as affording amusement more congenial to their tastes, and from thence to a large hall where they employed themselves in feasting. Gaetano also took his seat at the table, and listened anxiously to catch any words that might be turned to account.

"Well, my masters," said the old man, "ye lead a merry life, I suppose, at the court, what with feasting, and frolicking and fighting. The Virgin preserve us from such vagaries!"

"Hold, now, master chatelaine," was the reply, "thy remarks are not over-courteous. With respect to feasting and frolicking, why, by the mass! we not unfrequently find ourselves in the condition of a luckless mortal who, for some mis-

demeanor, is chained up where he can refresh his nostrils with the savory viands, and pass an opinion on their merits from the manner in which they are devoured by others :—an office which is no sinecure, I can assure thee. Then, as for fighting, why, we deserve to be rewarded for keeping the peace, except when we encounter a drunken Hungarian, (no rare sight by the way) and then a slight brawl does sometimes ensue. Still, with all these hardships, we envy thee not thy life with the bats and owls, master chatelaine; they must be but indifferent company."

"Never prate of hardships, man," said another; "our mode of life is, after all, a pleasant one; and since our worthy masters have betaken themselves to their own consultations, we will drink to their long continuance."

"It is passing strange," observed Gaetano, "what can have thus suddenly called together an assemblage of the most powerful barons in the kingdom. I hope no evil deed is about to be perpetrated."

"Nothing less strange," was the reply; "Italian nobles are so much given to secret conferences, and the point under discussion concerns neither thy interests nor mine. Perchance," continued he, directing the attention of his companions to the perturbed countenance of Gaetano, "perchance they may even meditate the burning of Naples, or some other act equally atrocious. Whatever it may be, we, as squires, are bound to aid and abet our masters; and I, for one, would hold the torch right willingly, could I be assured that some score of lazy Hungarians would perish in the flames."

"Confusion to the Hungarians in general, and to Father Roberto, in particular!" was the sentiment unanimously adopted; and, as a favorite song was soon after poured forth by the united voices of the company, the squire of the grand marshal succeeded in stealing from the apartment without attracting observation.

Conscious that no time was to be lost, he entered a narrow corridor which, being lighted only by a small loop-hole, was extremely dark; and, guided by his sense of hearing, he followed the low hum of voices, and soon reached the apartment to which the barons had retired. The door was carefully fastened, but, by means of a hole in the wall, to which he alternately applied his eye and ear, Gaetano discovered a

formidable looking conclave who were gathered round a large table. He recognised among others the king's two chamberlains, Fommaso and Masolo da Bologna, the Count d' Artugio, his son Count Beltrame, Count Marcone, and a number who had loudly murmured against the usurpations of the Hungarians and the government of Father Roberto. Their countenances wore an expression calculated to freeze the very blood; it was neither turbulent nor ferocious, but a calm, fixed, immovable look, which made all hope of a better change die away within the heart. On every lineament was written *resolve*. The squire also perceived Vivaldi, the goldsmith, whom he knew well, having often been despatched to his shop on commissions for his master.

"Nobles of the realm," said the grand marshal, "we have met here to-day not to murmur over our grievances, but to determine on the best way of getting rid of them. I but give utterance to the words which are written in your hearts, when I say that death alone, and the death of the foreigner Andreas can deliver us!"

"Pity it were not the villain friar!" said the Count Marcone, "for though we love not this foreign king, who has been set up over us, yet his thoughts are not so much viciousness as weakness, and they merit rather contempt than hatred. But as to this Father Roberto, nothing shall preserve him from our vengeance; and if we get not at him by any other way, we will even strike through Andreas."

"He is now locked up in the city with a crew of Hungarians," said another. "The ostensible purpose of this measure is retirement and prayer; but one of my followers, whom I sent there with some pretext on purpose to discover his employment, said that the worthy father's occupation could hardly be considered in a religious point of view, and that the place is but a scene of noise and revelling."

"Vivaldi," inquired the Count Capanno, "we have heard of various secret visits paid to thy residence by the monk, —what was the object of this? He could scarcely want jewels to adorn his graceful person; they would ill accord with that coarse robe and hempen girdle; perchance he came to leave his blessing."

The sneer which accompanied these words created a gene-

ral laugh; and when their merriment had subsided, Vivaldi replied:

"His coffers, my lord marshal, are too well stocked with gems to purchase from my poor assortment: the good father has a marvellous taste in these matters, as this trinket must show."

As the goldsmith held up the curiously-wrought chain, a passing ray of light fell upon the stones, and caused them to sparkle and glow with intense brilliancy. Their eyes were almost dazzled with its brightness; for the jewels were perfectly faultless, and shone with redoubled lustre from Vivaldi's skilful polishing.

"'Tis a splendid piece of jewelry," observed the Count Capanno, "and no less well-wrought than splendid; it could only have been thy work, Vivaldi—none other possesses so delicate a touch: surely, thou hast not made it for the burly neck of Father Roberto? 'Twere better bestowed elsewhere, methinks, than on one who abjures the vanities of the world. And yet," continued the grand marshal, as he examined the links more minutely, "I have seen this before; perchance 'twas in a dream."

"No more dream than that thou dreamest now," returned Count Beltrame. "I, too, have seen it before, and when I saw it last, it sparkled on the neck of Rosalba."

"Rosalba!" exclaimed the marshal. "What, he who vanished from court so suddenly, none knew whither?"

"The same. But there was one who knew, and that one was the villainous monk. A dispute occurred between them, caused by Father Roberto's insolence; and either his hand dealt the death-blow, or that of some fitting emissary hired for the purpose. His wealth, of course, enriched the hoards of the miserly friar. By the holy saints! we should all be humbly thankful that life is yet spared us—it may not be long."

"One thing, however, is certain," said the Count d'Artugio, "either we must kill Andreas, or we shall ourselves be murdered. We must take our choice."

"Andreas then, by all means!" echoed the others. "We care not to be martyred in the service of one who would not even thank us for the benefit."

"The *time has* come for action," said the grand marshal,

"and everything favors us. To-morrow's sun will rise upon a freed city, and then like scattered leaves will the worthless Hungarians rush from a place that can no longer afford them protection against the just avengers. Remember, comrades, that we are not about to perpetrate an ignoble crime, usurp the assassin's office for the mean purpose of plunder, or to gratify a petty hatred; but we shall be hailed as the deliverers of our country. A little while of secresy and concealment —a short time for the sudden frenzy to subside, and they will drag us forth from our obscurity, to honor as they should be honored, the saviors of Naples. Let this thought animate your hearts, and arm your nerves with strength; but the least twinge of fear, the least flinching of purpose, and the victor's crown and honors will be exchanged for the torture, the dungeon, and the scaffold."

"Never fear!" they all replied. "The thoughts of the monk Father Roberto will be sufficient to impart a steadiness of purpose; would that it were the villain himself whom we are about to strike!"

"It is; we strike at him through his shield, this weak-minded prince; once remove him who countenances and encourages this selfish rapacity, and we need no longer groan under the burden of foreign masters. But we must now decide upon the means of getting rid of Andreas."

Scarcely were the words uttered ere the flash of daggers gleamed brightly out; but the grand marshal smiled as he continued:

"Ay, an Italian way of settling disputes, I warrant me! But there are more ways than one of accomplishing business."

"Nothing could be easier," observed Masolo de Bologna, "than to put some poison in the cup of which he partakes so freely: I will undertake the office."

"No," replied the Count Capanno; "that, too, is truly Italian; but 'tis said that none can compound such medicines as skilfully as the holy friar, Father Roberto; and it would be somewhat out of our way, methinks, to apply to him to-night. Besides, it is too uncertain a scheme; the cup might be changed and bestowed on the monk, who, though he richly deserves it, would not answer our purpose of revenge. A stout cord would be much more effectual; Fommaso and Masolo will open the doors to us, and we can conceal ourselves

in the gallery; while Vivaldi, being unknown to the seneschal, will personate a courier from Naples, on business of importance, and by this means bring the king from his chamber. But although we are now all animated by the same purpose, when the moment comes for action some may flinch from the performance of their agreement; therefore we will take a solemn oath that shall irrevocably bind us."

The grand marshal produced a golden crucifix, and each repeating the name of his patron saint as he pressed his lips on the metal, one after another followed his example, until all had taken the dreadful oath. There was now an unbroken silence throughout the chamber, and each noble seemed buried in his own reflections.

Gaetano stood like one transfixed with horror; he had not distinguished all the words; the manner of the murder had almost escaped him, being breathed in a whispered tone; but it was now evident that the suspicions of the nurse were correct. Shocked at discovering the depth and ferocity of their hatred, and the prominent guilt of his master, he remained for some time incapable of speech or movement. But then came the necessity of immediate action, and he resolved to hasten to Naples and warn Isolda of the intended murder; even the memory of Isoldina was banished from his mind, and he thought only of saving the king's life.

Quickly and cautiously he escaped from the castle without the knowledge of his revelling companions, sprang into the boat, and knowing that life depended upon his efforts, reached the shore in an incredibly short space of time. The squires who remained to take charge of the horses, although they had manifested no curiosity with respect to their masters, extended not the same lenity towards Gaetano, and interrupting his progress, clamored to know the cause of his sudden departure.

Distressed and worried by this delay, the young man attempted to shake off his tormentors, and to their eager questions replied: "Hinder me not another moment; every second of time is precious; I go on business of importance for the grand marshal."

"Business of importance!" they rejoined. "What business can the grand marshal have that sends his squire from the castle so suddenly? We would have some insight into the matter."

Gaetano, perceiving that his replies only provoked more words and delay, hastily broke from them, and mounting his horse, sped away almost with the rapidity of lightning.

"He is surely crazed," said they. "What wild scheme can this be? Perchance 'tis none of his master's."

The squire flew wildly on in the direction of Naples, every other thought swallowed up in the rehearsal which he had lately witnessed. The rough, uneven lava at the foot of Mount Vesuvius offered many obstructions to his path; but reckless, abandoned to all around him, he still urged on his noble steed, until the animal, weak and exhausted with his efforts, stumbled and fell. His luckless rider was thrown heavily on the hard lava, but all feeling of pain was banished in insensibilty.

CHAPTER XII.

A PARTY of peasants were walking merrily along towards Mount Vesuvius, when one of them exclaimed:

"The blessed saints aid and deliver us! but a foul murder has lately been committed! Mark yon prostrate body with the hair clotted with blood, and the horse apparently dead beside it!"

They all hastened to the spot; and raising the unfortunate squire, discovered that the heart still beat faintly. Tenderly and carefully they carried him to the nearest village; while one of their number led the horse, which, overcome with fatigue, had fallen down beside its master.

When Gaetano awoke from his swoon, he found himself lying on a bed in a small cottage, situated in the hamlet of Torre del Greco. It was the time of day when the heat of the sun seems to be exhausted, and the golden beams came brightly through a thickly woven vine that shaded the window, and danced upon the wall in fantastic shapes; while a soft, delicious coolness breathed in the atmosphere. A delicate-looking woman, with a melancholy, yet pleasant countenance, was arranging a basket of olives by the open door, through which the cool breeze blew refreshingly upon his heated brow.

With returning consciousness came the remembrance of his mission, and he wondered what strange chance had hindered his progress, and placed him among these humble peasants. With a rapid movement he would have sprung from the couch, but the giddiness returned to his head, the room swam before his eyes, and again he fainted.

The woman hastened to his assistance, and applying a sponge of vinegar to his nose, the eyes languidly unclosed. What was the meaning of that sweet, mournful face that bent over him so tenderly, and why was he there? He glanced around the little chamber, and then remarked the drops of blood upon his clothes.

"You had a fall from your horse," said the woman, in answer to his inquiring gaze.

He now raised himself up, and the whole circumstance flashed upon his memory. But he must instantly set forth—no time was to be lost; and gaining his feet, he tottered to the door. A large, savage-looking man appeared just in time to break his fall; and seizing him by the arms, exclaimed in angry tones:

"So, this is your care, is it, Gionetta? A pretty job you would make of it, to let this sick youngster set forth when he not able to stand upon his feet, much less pay us! His clothes are good ones, and we may yet reap a fine round sum. No—no, young master, lie down again upon the couch—you stir not hence!"

"There," said Gaetano, displaying a well-filled purse, "let me depart instantly, and the money is thine. Do not hold me, good peasant, for life depends upon my journey—I must away, or the murder will be committed!"

His eyes had a wild, unsettled expression, and the man, taking no notice of his offers, turned to his wife, observing:

"The heavy fall hath crazed his brain; look to him, Gionetta, and see that he has all he needs."

The woman now approached Gaetano, and in kind tones persuaded him to lie down and compose himself.

"I know that you have now your senses," whispered she, "but my husband will not let you depart at present, for you are still too weak. Do not speak of murder again, or he will keep you longer."

Dejected and miserable, the sick youth sat down on the side of the couch, resting his aching brow upon his hands. Gionetta bathed his temples, and handed him a cooling drink which refreshed his parched throat, and then, with a weary sigh, returned to her olives.

The day glided on imperceptibly to even, and the first star of night peeped modestly forth. Two hours rest had somewhat restored his vigor, and rising from the couch, Gaetano approached the peasant, who, placing himself upon a low seat, had sat for some time with folded arms gazing at his *guest.*

Summoning as much resolution as possible, and with a tone that seemed to cast off all doubt of being allowed a free egress, he said, as he offered the man some gold:

"I thank you for your hospitality, and here is something to repay you for your trouble. Tell me where I can find my horse, if he is still alive, for I must instantly pursue my journey."

His host heeded not the inquiry, but continuing the fixed gaze, which was becoming actually disagreeable, replied by another question:

"Whither does your journey lead?"

"To Naples," rejoined Gaetano, who grew more impatient every moment.

"To *Naples!* There are disturbances at Naples now—a quiet village is far preferable, good sir. You cannot reach Naples before sunset."

"And what if I have to travel after sunset?" replied the young squire, rather testily.

"Travel after sunset!" ejaculated his interlocutor. "Now the saints forbid! Why, the road from Salerno is infested with banditti! But, perhaps," continued he with a sneer, "perhaps you fear them not for certain reasons. Brethren of a trade are not apt to harm one another, and they say such as I have mentioned are ever well dressed."

"I am neither a robber nor an enemy in disguise," replied Gaetano, with as much composure as he could command; "you can have no possible reason for detaining me here, and if you do, you may afterward repent it. Let me depart and you shall be suitably rewarded; for, although still weak, I am able to travel, and my journey is of vital importance. I have not a moment to lose."

The man could urge nothing against the reasonableness of this reply; and although, against his will, he suffered the young squire to pass him, and eagerly grasped the extended gold. But not until his wife reminded him did he depart in quest of the horse, although the young squire's pale countenance showed that he was little fit for any exertion that could be avoided. As the man disappeared, Gionetta, with a blush of shame for her husband's inhospitality, offered Gaetano the basket of olives as an exchange for his gold. But even had he been *willing to* accept them, it was impossible that his horse,

wearied and jaded as it was, could bear the additional burden; and, bidding adieu to Gionetta and her husband, he set forth a second time. The tear that was wiped so quietly away, like an unbidden guest, told him that his was not the only heavy heart. There are different kinds of misery, as various as the colors in the rainbow.

Very slowly, indeed, was Gaetano obliged to proceed—his head was dizzy and confused, and every moment threatened a fall from his saddle. The dark canopy above was thickly studded with the gems of night, and the last gleam of sunset had disappeared.

After a long and weary ride, he at length reached the city, but it was now the third hour of night, and the gates were closed! But the guards readily recognised him, and exclaimed:

"What! the squire of the grand marshal here at this hour, and in this plight! We thought he had gone to his mountain castle—what means this?"

"Do not ask me questions now," returned Gaetano, "I have no time for that; but, if you would do me a service, request the captain to have the gates opened. I must proceed to the Castel-Novo without delay."

Although wondering at the cause that brought him hither, they would not refuse to oblige him; and, before long, the gates were unfastened, and the squire approached the palace. All seemed unusually quiet, and some time elapsed before he could obtain admittance. At length a sleepy porter appeared, and, Gaetano, thrusting him aside, exclaimed:

"I must see Isolda, the nurse, instantly!"

"Whoever has run off with thy wits, young man, will soon restore them, for they are not worth the stealing," was the crusty rejoinder. "To hear him ask for the king's nurse!—when the king and queen and court went to Aversa this morning, and the nurse, of course, went with them!"

"Gone to Aversa!" exclaimed the young Italian, in despair. Fortune seemed, in this unfortunate affair, to have deserted him entirely; but inciting his horse forward, he plunged madly towards Aversa.

Here was another delay! The Capuan gate was closed and firmly guarded by a party of Hungarian soldiers, who, laughing at his entreaties, refused egress to all Italians.

"As you value your happiness," cried Gaetano wildly, "let me pass the gate! I must not be stopped, for there is a fearful deed in progress!"

"Ay! that is ever the way with you, Italians," was the sneering reply, "always dreaming of daggers and poisoned bowls. Go home and save your dreams till morning, worthy squire; by the express orders of Father Roberto, no one passes this gate till morning."

"Now, may the saints pardon me!" ejaculated Gaetano, "if ye will not give me egress by fair means, I must have it by foul!" Drawing his dagger, he exclaimed: "Away! I will cut down the first that opposes me!"

Two or three of the strong Hungarians seized his hands and disarmed him, while their leader said angrily:

"Place the Italian scoundrel under arrest, and to-morrow morning, sir squire, you will receive the punishment this insolence deserves!"

They immediately executed his orders; and the unfortunate Gaetano lost all remembrance in a burning fever.

The conspirators remained not much longer at the castle; but when they prepared to depart, the squire of the grand marshal was nowhere to be found.

"Now, this is more of his folly!" exclaimed the angry count. "The varlet shall be dismissed from service if he conducts not better! He was ever a gentle, obliging youth—what can have put this fit into his head?"

"He galloped from here as fast as his horse could carry him," said one of the squires, "not above two hours ago. He said that he went on private business for his master."

"He went on no business of mine," replied the grand marshal slowly and thoughtfully; "what can it mean, d'Artugio?"

With an ashy brow he turned to the count, who whispered in a low, suppressed voice:

"We are betrayed, Capanno!"

"*Betrayed!*—how could he have gained our secret?"

"By *listening*."

"*Listening*, man? He would not so disgrace the honor of a squire! But what should tempt him to such an act? He knew nothing of our plans."

"Depend upon it, Capanno, he guessed their import. I verily believe he overheard our conversation by the way; the

Hungarian nurse was ever watchful and suspicious, and this youth being allied to her interests through the daughter, would take every opportunity of favoring them. He has listened to the whole plot, and is now on the road to Aversa to warn the king and court."

"By the holy wafer! d'Artugio, it may be even as thou sayest! Spurs there to the horses instantly!" cried the grand marshal in an excited tone. "We take the road to Aversa. We will make all possible speed," continued he, in a low voice to his companion, "and see how things stand, that we may have opportunity for timely flight."

The horses were put to their utmost speed, and when they reached Aversa, they cautiously entered in small bodies by different gates, and proceeded at once to the castle.

Andreas saw their approach from a covered porch, where he was employed with a servant in examining the jesses of his favorite hawks.

"Ah!" exclaimed the king, "so thou art tired of thy mountain castle, my lord marshal, and art come to try the pleasures of the Celestine gardens. Thou hast displayed more wisdom in the change than in the first choice. And a jovial time we will have of it, my lord barons—a merry, pleasure-seeking time. The state business of Naples is cast over to his reverence, the Pope, until the coronation; and away with pomp and wearisome ceremonies—away with the brawls, sycophants, and disturbances of a court! We will have a grand villegitura, with hunting and hawking, dancing and banqueting. Watch but this hawk, Capanno—see! see how high she soars!"

The conspirators felt rather uneasy at the thoughtless confidence of the boy-king, as he sat amusing himself with trifles, little dreaming of the horrible catastrophe that awaited him. Every moment they passed in his presence became more intolerable; and, at length, d'Artugio ventured to say:

"We crave pardon of your highness for thus appearing in the royal presence, but we will instantly to our chambers and don a more fitting dress."

"Nay," replied the king with a laugh, as he jestingly detained him, "thy dress already betrays sufficient of the coxcomb, d'Artugio—'tis the Italian foible. Change it not for us; we like thee better in this, for we wish not to be re-

minded of the courtly city, where a man cannot stir without donning a different attire."

"But the queen?" they artfully rejoined. "We cannot present ourselves thus before a delicate lady, our sovereign, and etiquette demands that we should immediately pay our respects to her gracious majesty."

"True," said Andreas, as he cast a lingering look upon his birds; "Joanna leans to the Neapolitan weakness in that respect. Now we think of it, we also must change our attire to appear in the royal presence; so away to your apartments, my lords, and we will meet again this evening."

The thoughtless victim departed, amusing himself with the boyish pleasure of whistling, and the conspirators separated with guilty consciences.

The purple tinge of day was just fading in the west, with all the beauty of an Italian sunset. Why did the moon rise clear and cloudless on that fearful night? Why was not the sky darkened, and Heaven's vengeance poured forth upon the conspirators? But quiet and subdued was that scene of earth's loveliness; the air was rife with the fragrance of the orange and lemon blossoms, and the sunlight had fled from the shaded grove to slumber on the bosom of the deep. The queen, leaning on the arm of Philippa, passed slowly to and fro on the vine-covered balcony; and ever and anon putting aside the jasmine and passion-flowers that clustered around it, she gazed forth upon the calm and beautiful scene, and involuntarily sighed. Perchance she sighed as she contrasted the still beauty of the summer landscape with the tumultuous passions that heaved and throbbed in the hearts of those by whom she was surrounded. There are moments, however, when without any apparent cause, when the sunshine is gladdening the hearts of others, and the treasures of earth, its flowers, its skies, and its transient pleasures, occasion that outpouring joy, which is *real*, not put on to deceive the multitude; there are moments even then, when a dark pall falls upon the soul, and the heart reads scenes of future storms and trials. These moments are as landmarks to the traveller along the path of life, when he looks back upon the Past: for they are there still, with their dark influence marring even the brighter scenes that succeed.

A long, deep window, festooned with gauze-like curtains, opened into an adjoining apartment. There was a quiet spell

about the room, and in the atmosphere that breathed of a pure, invisible influence; the hand of the free-booter would have been stayed on the threshold, nor would he have desecrated its sanctity by intrusion. A host of unseen spirits ever hover about the pure and true, and keep off with a powerful force the approach of contaminating evil. A velvet cushion flung upon a couch, with its long, golden tassels resting on the floor, still bore the impress of a reclining form; a prayer-book and crucifix were lying near; all was as Joanna had left it, and a sweet gentle influence, still hovered around.

"Beautiful, too beautiful scene," said Joanna, as she traversed with the eye of an enthusiast the prospect that opened upon her view. "Surely, Philippa, the fates have committed some mistake, in assigning me the rank of queen, for willingly would I exchange the gorgeous trappings and wearisome splendors of royalty, to linger out my life in some quiet spot like this, surrounded only by those I love. Wouldst thou not too, Philippa, gladly resign wealth and honors for the pure, undefiled loveliness of nature—the blithe, joyous feeling of a peaceful heart!"

The Catanese was silent, although an involuntary smile played about her mouth, as she gazed upon the queen with astonishment. What! willing to resign what was to her an ardently coveted possession! Murmuring against the decree of fate, when that decree had assigned to her a crown!

Joanna smiled as she continued: "What, dissembler! thou enviest not a cottage life, and dost prefer the noise and bustle of a court to the murmur of flowing rivulets? A crown were better bestowed on thee than on our poor self—the gift would not be repaid with ingratitude."

"There is," replied Philippa, "a charm to me in the very name of rank and power;—I live, I breathe but in its atmosphere. Were I condemned to the one unvarying scene that excites the royal admiration, my life would be but a dreary one, not worth the keeping."

"Even thus, Philippa, could I breathe out my life," murmured the queen, as her eyes sought the cloudless sky; "with the calm, blue vault of heaven above—and below, the deep, rich groves of orange trees, and lulled by the soft, wailing breeze, methinks I could sleep without the knowledge of death. *But oh! it is fearful*—fearful to die amid glaring eyes and flash-

ing steel, while the life-blood wildly rushes through the bursting veins, and every nerve throbs with agony in the wild effort to be free! I feel a dark, dim foreboding that mine will be an end of violence: fearful images crowd upon my brain, and throng my troubled dreams. Not with the pulse feeble and tremulous, the body wasted by slow disease, and that scarcely perceptible passing from the lower to the spiritual world, so gentle that it seems an angel's breath; not such for me! but the gleaming dagger, the poisoned bowl, and a crowd of stony faces. Oh! save me from this terrible fate!"

There was a wild, fearful expression in the usually placid countenance, a shaking of the slender frame that betokened no common emotion. Philippa, terrified at this sudden agitation, gently supported the trembling form—tenderly as a young mother caresses her first-born infant, and entreated her to be calm.

"Do not, dear lady, give way to these terrible imaginings—they are but the fancies of a disturbed mind; rouse yourself, throw off the depression of spirits, and they will disappear. Your majesty has no cause for fear; Naples is quiet, the Hungarians are enlivening the otherwise solitude of Father Roberto, and, perchance, they may take themselves off entirely to their hitherto forsaken kingdom, with the friar at their head. 'Twere indeed a riddance, for which our holy Mother would deserve especial thanks!"

"None have witnessed my weakness—none but thou, Philippa?" said the queen, inquiringly, as the graceful form resumed its wonted bearing.

"There are none others within calling, lady—we are quite alone."

"There are moments," continued Joanna, "when the spirit, forgetting its higher aims—its nobler powers, resigns itself to the influence of a passing cloud, a momentary darkness that enwraps it like a veil. Forget this, Philippa—it was a foolish superstition, little befitting thy sovereign."

The Catanese saw that the shadow still rested upon Joanna in spite of her efforts to dispel it, and a corresponding gloom stole into her own heart.

"Philippa," whispered the queen, as she softly put back the blind of leaves, "come hither and gaze upon this picture which I *would not* have disturbed. Is it not a lovely one?"

She looked towards the orange grove to which Joanna pointed, and there, amid the green leaves of a well-laden tree, pressed forth a bright, happy face, while, on the grass beneath, a beautiful chubby boy rolled over and over with peals of merry laughter. A sudden change of position revealed the mother more fully—a young Italian peasant, with a pearly freshness of complexion, a dark merry eye, and a mouth which seemed formed only for smiles. Her scarlet bodice contrasted brightly with the long plaits of midnight hair; and, with rare grace, she balanced the well-filled basket upon her head as she cautiously descended.

"See!" exclaimed the queen, "she wreathes his head with orange leaves, and smiles with such a bright, beautiful smile! She is happy—she asks no more. Wealth, fame, rank, all are compressed into that one single moment!"

"She is the wife of Pietro, the laborer," said Philippa. "They married with scarcely a crust of bread to drive away hunger—but both work hard from morn till even, singing merrily all the while; and, at night, they go to their low cot and forget their toil in the child, and each other's smiles. They are very poor."

"*Poor!*" repeated Joanna. "No, they are not poor—they have a priceless jewel!"

She remained for some time gazing on the innocent, beautiful picture, and followed the two with a lingering gaze as they emerged from the grove and disappeard.

Philippa was pondering upon the queen's last words, and Joanna, with her back to the window, still gazing towards the orange grove, when Andreas, springing lightly through the open casement, placed himself beside her.

"What, star-gazing, most beauteous wife and gracious sovereign? Those large eyes of thine have a rare loveliness when upraised as now. But, come, let us away to the garden —I have much to tell thee."

As the queen turned, an approving smile greeted his appearance; she saw, with pleasure, that he had evidently paid particular attention to his toilet, and *that* exertion must have been made solely for her sake—for no other human being would he have made it. A suit of dark, maroon-colored velvet was arranged with becoming grace, and the sleeves were finished at the wrist by wide cuffs of rich point lace. His hair

had been carefully arranged, and as he stood before her with a bright color in his cheeks, the result of exercise and happiness, Joanna inwardly acknowledged the improvement which had taken place. With a countenance beaming with affection and confidence, she passed her arm in his, and descended to the garden.

"We leave thee, lady countess, as sentinel to our chamber," said the queen merrily, as she passed her, "unless thy inclination leads thee elsewhere."

"I will stay and await your majesty's return," replied Philippa. Then, as she entered the solitary apartment, she continued: "It is both a pity and a shame that our sweet queen is chained for life to that graceless boy. Joanna deserves a far better fate."

Taking up the prayer-book, she attempted to read the services; but, finding her thoughts wandering from her task, she replaced the volume, and sat listening to the monks, who, in the monastery adjoining, were chanting the evening hymns.

The queen wandered with Andreas through the acacia walks, and, leaning fondly on his arm, attempted to mingle a few words of affectionate advice with her remarks.

"I wish to speak to thee plainly, my husband," said Joanna, raising to his a pair of eyes that beamed lovingly upon him, "and though my words may, perchance, give offence from their very undisguised abruptness, yet, I would speak to thee truly and earnestly—even as it is our duty to warn those we love from any threatening danger."

Andreas avoided those mild eyes, and, with an attitude of conscious shame, awaited the expected rebuke.

"I do not mean to reproach thee, Andreas, for thou hast lately been more than usually abstemious; but I would warn thee to beware the wine-cup. To-night will be a night of revelry and feasting—O! may a wife's tears and prayers have their effect! Promise me, Andreas, that thou wilt not linger over the banquet-table till past midnight, as thou hast often done, but retire to bed in season, and to-morrow we will fly our hawks in the woods of Atella. Promise me, Andreas."

"I do promise thee, Joanna, for who can refuse aught to thy entreaties? But I will now faithfully fulfil the promise, for Father Roberto will not be beside me to—"

The king stopped, fearful of committing his tutor. The monk's influence seemed to linger even where his presence was not.

"Andreas," said Joanna tremulously, "thou hast already uttered sufficient to unveil the friar, and expose him in his true character; but spare thy self-reproaches for the unintentional act, for had thy lips not breathed a word, I was aware of what they but repeated. Too long have I perceived and dreaded his influence over thee, my husband; it has cost me many bitter, bitter tears—many weary nights of waking, as the sounds of revelry reached me in my solitary chamber, and I knew that thou wast among the riotous group. I have long dreaded and feared this Father Roberto. I can perceive that he uses religion but as a cloak to cover his enormities, and, therefore adds hypocrisy to other and more glaring sins. I have feared that his excesses and insolent conduct might rouse the haughty Neapolitan nobility to an open revolt, and, truly, it would be no great marvel! They are a proud race—proud of the ancient blood in their veins—proud of their unsullied name—and proud, no less, of their bravery and talents. It is not to be expected that such men should submit tamely to the tyranny of an Hungarian friar; and even when all around seems peaceful, I fear some yawning chasm ready to open beneath my feet."

"Thou speakest truly, Joanna—but too truly. The friar is as thou hast said, a compound of hypocrisy, and by the mass! I begin to tire of his domineering influence."

"Andreas—my husband," replied the queen, as she regarded him with a gentle though steady gaze, "thou hast already advanced one step towards amendment by confessing this unlawful tyranny; complete it by throwing off the yoke—resolve to be *free!* Send this meddling friar back to his own kingdom, and renewed happiness will reward the exertion."

"It is no trifling achievement," rejoined Andreas; "like a spreading tree he has firmly embedded himself in the soil, and first one clinging root, and then another, must be removed, before he is fairly turned out. But to please thee, my gentle wife, no less than to deliver the kingdom, I will make the trial. Ah! there come the Neapolitan lords to pay their *respects to* their sovereign."

Joanna paused on her walk to receive the advancing nobles; and the grand marshal, Count d'Artugio, Count Beltrame, Count Marcone, and Count Tralizzo, came up and made their several obeisances. Never had the queen appeared so beautiful; the pleasing effect of her conversation with Andreas had imparted a warm glow to the delicate cheek—the whole countenance beamed with hope and happiness—the parted lips wore a deep, vermillion hue—and the eyes, those beautiful eyes! were absolutely radiant.

Her charms burst upon them like a gleam of dazzling sunshine, and the nobles were all gazing at her with a respectful, admiring glance. The blood ran quicker through their veins, and they almost wished for some wrong to present itself, that their swords might fly from their scabbards to show how ready they were to peril life for the beautiful woman whom they called sovereign. Joanna, with a feminine instinct, marked this evident admiration in pleased consciousness; but as their prolonged gaze dyed her cheek with blushes, and rendered her position rather embarrassing, she turned to the grand marshal:

"We did hear, my lord count, that preferring the charms of thy mountain-castle to the pleasures of a court, thou hadst betaken thyself thither. Thy stay was not of long duration."

"We cannot long exist without the sun, lady—away from my sovereign the days passed but wearily, and I hastened back to bask again in the light of those gracious smiles"

Capanno—the rough, hot-blooded Capanno turned courtier! It could not be! What had produced this marvellous change? They gazed from the marshal to the queen, and then the change was no longer marvellous.

Joanna, ill-prepared for this shower of compliments, now sought to keep up her queenly dignity; and changing the conversation, spoke in a grave tone of the state affairs of Naples. These important points discussed, the nobles prepared to take their leave; and Joanna, refusing all attendance to the royal residence, as she intended to linger a while longer in the garden, committed Andreas to their care as they parted for the evening.

"*To thee, d'Artugio*, our kinsman and friend, do we deliver

our royal consort; and we shall call thee to an account if he is returned one whit less sober. He must not be tempted on this banquet-night: but we have no fear of thee, and these other faithful nobles—he is safe in their hands."

The nobles winced under this unmerited praise, and the smile that accompanied it sent a dagger to their hearts.

CHAPTER XIII.

JOANNA wandered on alone through the retired walks, pondering on their last conversation as she wondered if fate had yet happiness in store for her. Never had Andreas displayed so little of the wayward child, so much of the thoughtful, serious man: and she began to think that could he be removed from the influence of Father Roberto, he might become all that she could wish. And he had promised to make the effort, to banish the scheming friar; and then she would be released from one whose presence had ever been a source of fear and dread.

She was no longer alone; there was a sound of approaching footsteps; and turning, she beheld Philippa, who with anxious countenance eagerly advanced to meet her.

"Well," exclaimed the queen, "so thou too hast wandered forth, tempted by the beauty of evening, for all thy late disparaging remarks on lovely nature. Thy opinions, Philippa, are but a skeptic's theory, and thou canst not always act up to them. I have caught thee at last, lady countess; and right glad am I to discover this gleam of something purer, better beneath the pride and pomp in which thou hast enwrapped it —even though thy countenance seems to disclaim such thoughts by yonder rising color."

"I came not hither to gaze upon the beauty of evening," replied the Catanese, "but to seek you, lady, and beseech you speedily to return. The night dews are falling fast, and the loveliness of even is but a snare, beneath which is often concealed pestilence and death."

"Thou art but a bird of ill-omen, to-night, Philippa; draw this robe close round our shoulders, for we must even brave these chance evils a while longer. Thou dost remind us somewhat of a gloomy misanthrope, who would not admire the beauty of any blooming flower for fear that poison might be

concealed beneath its loveliness—who would admit to his bosom neither friendship nor love, for they might chance to grow cold—who would not inhale the fresh, reviving air for fear the breath of pestilence would come borne upon its sweetness. He shut himself up from the world, languished and died. Good and evil are so mingled here below that we can scarcely take one without receiving the other. 'Tis wisely ordered—for were it otherwise, earth would be paradise itself, and we should never long for the glory of the spiritual world. I have been wrapt in silent contemplation of yonder glorious orbs," continued the queen, as the beautiful eyes were upraised with a look of inspiration; "seest thou that one with the bright, golden beams, Philippa? I have chosen it for my destiny—it is fair and cloudless."

Philippa, as she followed the eyes of the queen, gazed also on the star which long—long ago, on that mysterious well-remembered night, had been pointed out as *hers;* but an expression as though of pain crossed her face, and with a dark, gloomy foreboding, she marked the faint light that shot from it, while, beside the others, it looked dull and lifeless. She was superstitious, and to her it seemed the clouding of her destiny.

"I am very happy to-night, Philippa," said the queen, as, leaning upon her arm, she raised a sweet face glowing with hope and joy; "my heart bounds lightly and joyously as it did in by-gone days, ere care had clogged its springs, and caused the blood to flow more coldly, calmly on."

Philippa made no reply—she could not—a dark fear was busy at her own heart—a dread of some forthcoming evil; and, though she marvelled what brought this sudden gloom, she could not emerge from the shadow. At length the uncertain foreboding assumed a more tangible shape—it appeared in the form of *murder;* and, as the confession of the goldsmith's daughter rushed upon her mind, she apprehended the speedy performance of the fearful tragedy.

As she unrobed the queen on returning to the house, her eye, with the glance of a falcon's, examined every object in the chamber, to discover any signs of hidden weapons or concealed assassins. Joanna did not retire to bed as was her custom, but placed herself by the open window to await the return of Andreas. The Catanese, having discovered that all

was as usual in the royal apartment, and, therefore, she might safely leave her mistress, made some excuse and hastened to execute her plan.

Entering a small ante-chamber in which the king often slept, she proceeded in the darkness to examine the couch. As she put aside the purple hangings she felt around cautiously and tremblingly, almost fearing to meet some hidden foe. She turned over the bed, but all was the same; no trace of hidden conspirators could be discovered. Summoning a bold heart, she passed through the gallery, examined behind the tapestry, and proceeded through all the principal chambers; but none wore the appearance of any secret plot, and with a somewhat lightened heart she returned to the queen's apartment, determined not to leave her for the present.

The conspirators, having followed Andreas to the banquet-hall, took an opportunity to slip out unperceived, for the purpose of a secret conference.

"Now," whispered the grand marshal, "it must be our business to ply this boy most liberally with wine, the better to suit our purpose. I will sit next him when we return, and it shall not be my fault if he is not as drunk as we could wish him. Why does not Vivaldi come? We can scarcely do without the goldsmith, for he has a quick hand and a stealthy step."

"He returned to Naples from the islet," replied d' Artugio, "in order to prevent suspicion at home, but he promised to be with us an hour before midnight. He has probably not well calculated the distance from Naples to Aversa."

"His daughter," said Count Beltrame, "had, as I told you, overheard our secret, and seemed almost frantic at the conspiracy; but, Vivaldi, fearful that she would betray him, has contrived to lull her suspicions of the approaching murder,—and she now believes him to be repentant and quite resolved to lend no aid towards the furtherance of our scheme. She is a creature of rare beauty, and could almost persuade him thus in earnest."

It was so; Vivaldi, heedless of all good suggestions, and influenced by mistaken thoughts of duty, had stooped to deceive his daughter—and she was rejoicing at the change in her father, even while he played the hypocrite. He no longer treated her as a plaything, a spoiled child on whom to

heap caresses and costly presents; but he now often sought her advice, and allowed her free egress from her apartment whenever she felt inclined to exchange her solitude for the bustling city.

Beatrice had realized her first ideas of beauty, wealth and grandeur, as she saw the brilliant cavalcade that attended the queen pass through the city on their way to Aversa. It was that early hour of the morning, when the first beams of day fall brightly and cheerily on every object; and the golden rays shone on glittering steel and graceful plumes, gorgeous robes and gaily decked steeds, as they wound through the principal street. A milk-white charger that bore the queen tossed his head impatiently, and snuffed the air as though proud of his royal burden. As Joanna passed, a deafening shout arose from the multitude:

"Long live the queen! Long live our good queen Joanna!"

The young sovereign bowed low to these reiterated plaudits till her fair head almost touched the saddle, and the shouts swelled louder than before.

Beatrice could only distinguish a very slight, graceful figure, that sat the fiery charger with perfect ease; but as a sudden opening in the crowd revealed a beautiful, childlike face, covered with blushes, and partly shaded by the long, drooping plume that graced her riding-cap, the young girl could hardly refrain from joining in the national enthusiasm.

Flowers were thrown in Joanna's path, and one of the young nobles near her, lightly springing from his horse, rescued a delicate bouquet from the trampling hoofs of her steed, and presented it to the queen as he vaulted into his saddle. As Joanna placed it in her bosom, a shout of "Long live our young and beauteous queen!" again rent the air; and with tears of pleasure glistening in those dove-like eyes, she rode on.

But Beatrice, dazzled by the rare loveliness of the queen, the splendor of the royal train, and the waving of plumes and scarfs, could hardly comprehend the muttered anathemas which followed the path of Andreas.

"See!" exclaimed they, "the stores of Naples cannot afford materials worthy this foreign prince, but he must deck himself in Hungarian finery, forsooth. Pity he remained not in his

own native kingdom, nor came to trouble Naples with his presence!"

"Ay!" was the rejoinder, "he may yet rue the day that he came to tyrannize over the inhabitants of a free city, with his crowd of hungry, lazy followers!"

Beatrice perceived that there was a general disaffection with respect to Andreas, and trembling for the result, she retired again to her chamber, as she pondered over the misery and danger that could be concealed beneath the glittering robes of royalty.

But to return to the conspirators. "How can we," observed Raimondo da Napoli, "tempt the king with wine, when it was the parting request of our beautiful queen that we should watch over him at the banquet-table? I, for one, have not the heart to do it."

"Then prithee carry thy heart where it is wanted, Merser Napoli," rejoined the grand marshal, "for it will be of little use here, I foresee. The queen, no doubt, would grieve and be justly offended, were we to intoxicate him for the mere amusement of the thing after her affectionate warning. But such is not our purpose; we wish to rid Naples of a pest, and in order to effect our scheme, we must attempt to take away the little sense originally bestowed upon Andreas. Methinks the sorrow of the young and beautiful queen for the death of this awkward boy cannot be very lasting, although the kindness of her heart would lead her to pity any one thus suddenly removed."

They resumed their places at the table, and conversing gaily with their victim, endeavored to put him off his guard. But Andreas remembering Joanna's approving smile, and with her affectionate warning still fresh upon his mind, for once could not be persuaded to indulge in excess, and the conspirators watched him with anxious feelings.

"We will drink, lords and nobles," said the Count d'Artugio, in a perfectly unmoved voice, "to the approaching coronation of our excellent prince. Long may he live to wear the crown of Naples!"

"An event that shall never happen," muttered the grand marshal. Respectfully standing, they drank the proposed toast, and their victim, looking gratefully around upon the assembled company, replied:

"I thank you for this compliment, barons and nobles of the realm, and hope that the day you speak of will never be a source of otherwise than pleasure. And now for the present, farewell! I leave you to the enjoyment of the banquet."

Andreas departed quite sober, and Count Beltrame murmured:

"'Twere a pity to cut him off when he promises so well—shall we not give him another trial?"

"By all means," responded the grand marshal; "and have the pleasure of finding, on our return, that Hungarian guests have taken possession of our residences. Truly, the gentle dominion of the good Father Roberto is both pleasant and soothing!"

"Down with the Hungarians!" echoed the assembled company. "We have borne with them too long—'tis high time they were dispersed!"

"The moment has now come," resumed the grand marshal, when bold hearts and brave arms are necessary for our purpose. If there are any troubled with a slight twinge of conscience, let them strengthen their hearts with the remembrance of their wrongs, and a full goblet of wine. If *that* fails, they had best take their departure from a scene where they can be of no use."

All now protested their readiness; and Masolo da Bologna, one of the king's chamberlains, rising from the table said:

"It is time that ye concealed yourselves in the corridor—it only wants an hour to midnight, the exact time that Vivaldi promised to be here. If he comes, he will represent the courier from Naples, who is to call Andreas from his chamber, and then we can soon despatch him by means of that strong cord. In case Vivaldi should fail us, Tommaso and myself will be in readiness to open the door of the king's apartment to you, when, without making any noise to disturb the queen, we can soon quiet him."

Following the chamberlain, they left the hall and proceeded to the small gallery which opened into the royal apartments. After a little previous conversation, they established themselves behind the tapestry; and there, with the beautiful moonlight prospect below them, and their hearts beating al-

most audibly out upon the stillness, they awaited their victim.

Night had thrown her sable pall upon the silent city, and scarcely a footfall sounded through the quiet streets. Father Roberto, now that those before whom he cared to keep up appearances had departed from Naples for the present, had shut himself up in a strong palace with a chosen body of Hungarians, and spent the time in feasting and drinking, in place of the prayers, hymns, and devotions which should more properly occupy one of his holy profession.

Beatrice Vivaldi, with an indescribable, undefined sensation of coming evil, prepared to go to evening mass; and entering a chamber at the back of the shop, she beheld her father lying upon a couch, and apparently buried in slumber. He did not start as she pressed a gentle kiss upon his brow, and his breathing was regular as a child's. She passed into the street, wondering at her fears, and yet experiencing an impulse to turn back.

The moment she was gone, Vivaldi rose, and hastily seizing a cloak, hurried from the house. A fleet horse carried him to Aversa; and on reaching the royal residence, he knocked loudly for the porter.

"I must see his majesty instantly!" exclaimed he. "I come from Naples on business of importance."

"You cannot see the king now," was the reply; "he sought his chamber long since for the night."

"More likely you have mistaken the place, my good friend," returned Vivaldi; "it is far more probable that he is in the banquet-room."

"I tell you, man," replied the porter, "that he has gone to bed. Your business must stand over till morning."

"That it cannot do," rejoined Vivaldi; "and thou must away instantly, and tell the king that a courier from Naples desires speech with him. A refusal will be of small benefit to thee."

The servant awed by his tone, bade him follow, and led the way to the royal apartments. The queen still sat by the window gazing out upon the beauty of night, and Andreas was slowly pacing up and down the room, when the news arrived that a courier from Naples desired to speak with the king.

"A courier from Naples at this time of night!" exclaimed

Joanna. "What can it mean? Is a conflagration spreading over the city? Has any fearful pestilence broken out? Has— speak! what is it that thus calls our royal consort from his chamber at this unsuitable hour?"

"He gave no message," replied the man, "but demanded instant conference with the king."

"Strange—very strange," murmured the queen, in deep thought. "I fear that some terrible catastrophe hath taken place at Naples, else why this night-errand?"

"I fear naught," said Andreas, laughing; "thou art too desponding, Joanna. I will confer with this impatient messenger, and then, like a good husband and a true, give thee the subject of our conversation."

Thus saying, he left the chamber and proceeded to the gallery; but no courier was visible. Vivaldi had, in reality, stepped aside to speak with the conspirators, and now emerged from some intricate labyrinth.

"Be quick, master courier," said Andreas; "we wait to learn the business that calls us from our chamber at this hour of midnight."

"Your majesty must approach nearer," rejoined Vivaldi; "what I have to communicate is of the greatest importance, and must not be whispered where listening ears are ready to take up and repeat it."

"'Tis silly to humor thee," replied the king; "but as we have gone thus far, we would fain see the rest. Now for this wonderful communication—this pearl of secrets!"

"'Tis here," said Vivaldi.

That was to be the signal, and as he spoke out rushed the conspirators, and seizing Andreas, quickly gagged his mouth and imprisoned his hands. So noiselessly and rapidly had they effected this movement, that no sound of a scuffle reached the ears of the queen.

"Now," said they, "fasten the cord tightly around his neck, and all will soon be over."

It was done; and the king fell back a senseless, lifeless corpse. A desperate, ineffectual struggle had taken place—a fearful contortion of the pallid features; but no cry proceeded from their victim to rouse the other inmates to his assistance. As they felt that cold, leaden weight, the murderers started, and turned the face of the dead king to the moonlight. It

was black and convulsed, and encircling the neck was still the fatal cord, with a deepening purple line all around it. The deed was accomplished! It was sudden: they had had many long and secret meetings, many plots and schemes to effect their purpose; and it had seemed to them as though the act itself would take more time—that there would be obstacles, and struggling, and discovery perhaps in the very act. But no; Fortune had appeared to favor them; they were apparently as safe from human intervention as though the deed had been done in a trackless forest, unknown to the foot of man; the work of a moment had hurried him into eternity. A moment? It could not be! Perhaps he was not really dead. They placed their hands upon his heart—it had ceased to beat; they touched his brow—it was cold, and they shuddered at the touch. They placed him in a reclining position against the wall, and then stood for a few minutes, each seeking the other's eyes, and yet quailing beneath the glance with hearts of conscious guilt.

"And *this* is murder!" said Count Beltrame at last, in a hollow tone, as he shudderingly glanced at the body. "This is the end for which we have toiled, and schemed, and plotted."

"*Murder!*" exclaimed his father, indignantly. "It ill befits one of the royal line to call a meritorious deed by so foul a name. This *is* the end to which we have looked forward, and little did I deem that those who then appeared so resolute and determined would, when they had accomplished their wishes, stand thus like a parcel of frightened fools, not knowing whither to turn—afraid even of each other's looks!"

This taunt roused them, and approaching d' Arturgio, they consulted as to what was to be done.

"Come, Capanno, Napoli, Tralizzo, Beltrame," he continued, "all of you help me to raise this body and remove it from the inspection of those who may every moment be passing. They might be led to think that Andreas had met with foul play from this mark around his neck."

"But whither shall we convey it?" inquired Vivaldi.

"Bury it in the garden, to be sure," replied d' Arturgio, "it were better to conceal him than to let them see that he has been murdered, and how."

"But we will scarcely have time," they rejoined, "we shall be discovered; 'twere best to fly as soon as possible."

"We will fasten this cord," said the grand marshal, "to the edge of the balcony, and let Andreas swing from thence as though he had hung himself. As he was always addicted to wine, they will suppose that he did the deed in a fit of intemperance. Therefore, no suspicion will fall upon any one else, and there will be no need of flight, except from hence."

"An excellent plan!" they replied, and immediately proceeded to obey his orders. They fastened the king securely to the balcony, and then quickly descended and gained the garden below.

But scarcely had they resumed their feet, ere the cord, (which was a slight one, and had not been sufficiently examined) broke with the weight of Andreas, and he was precipitated to the ground beside them.

"Now may ill-luck light on the head of him who twisted this rotten string!" cried the fiery marshal; "it will, perchance, be the means of bringing us all to the scaffold!"

"Quick!" exclaimed Masolo da Bologna; "we must bury him instantly, for we have not a moment to lose. This is the hour at which Isolda, the nurse, enters the royal chambers to inquire if her beloved foster-son has well rested, or is in want of her services. A plague on her watchfulness! And the old Hungarian will soon report us without mercy."

They immediately commenced their work, but ere long Vivaldi started, as he exclaimed:

"Ha! what noise is that? We are surely discovered!"

"A plague upon thy cowardice, man!" replied d'Arturgio, "'tis only a noise which thou hast conjured up for the occasion. Go on with the work—there is no time to be lost."

"D'Arturgio," said the grand marshal, "he is not mistaken, I distinctly hear the sounds of advancing footsteps. And by all that's evil!" he continued, "yonder glimmers a light, and Isolda bears it! Quick! step into this walk until she is gone."

The light remained stationary for a short time, and then disappeared.

"Now is the time," whispered d'Artugio, "we must fly, for she will probably raise the house."

Their horses were not far off, and, escaping by a secret passage, they mounted them and rode briskly on in the direction of Atella.

Joanna remained by the window, awaiting her husband's return. Never had Andreas seemed so dear to her as on that fatal night; he had grieved over his past conduct, and promised a total reform—years of happiness seemed opening before her. The night wore on—moments had become hours, and still he came not. What could be the cause of this extraordinary delay? Had the messenger demanded his immediate presence at Naples? If so, he would assuredly have told her his intention before departing. Or had some of the revellers waylaid him and persuaded him to return to the banquet-hall? Alas! in spite of his newly-formed resolutions, this appeared by far the most likely supposition, for she knew that a party of Hungarians were still below, and they always drank deep and long.

"What can keep him?" inquired the queen of Philippa, who, faithful and untiring, had determined not to leave her mistress till the king's return. "He comes not," she continued, "and my head throbs with pain; I will to bed, Philippa, and when he comes he can lie down in the ante-chamber."

The Catanese forbore to increase Joanna's distress, but she felt conscious, in her own mind, that the banquet-hall had again allured him. The queen fell into an uneasy slumber disturbed by restless dreams, and Philippa watched beside her.

Some one was entering the open door that led to the ante-chamber, and as Philippa angrily turned at this intrusion, she saw the Hungarian nurse advancing with a lamp.

"Begone!" said she, "you will disturb the queen. See, she is already moving."

"Where is my foster-son?" inquired Isolda. "His bed has not been slept in, and I have come to seek him."

"He is not here," replied Philippa; "the banquet-hall is the most likely place to find him. There! you have waked the queen," she added reproachfully.

Joanna, disturbed by the light which flashed across her eyes, raised herself up on the side of the couch, and demanded who had thus broken her slumbers.

"'Tis Isolda, the nurse," said Philippa angrily; "I forbade her entering, but she is on some wild-goose-chase after the king."

"It is now long past midnight," rejoined Isolda, "and

my royal master has not yet retired to his chamber. With your majesty's permission I will go in search of him."

"I know not where he can be," replied the queen mournfully, "unless he has returned to the revellers. A courier from Naples requested speech with him, and he has not yet been seen. That was a long while since."

Isolda now departed, and proceeded immediately to the saloon. The Hungarians had not ceased their libations until insensibility stretched them on the floor in a drunken stupor. The nurse attentively examined them, but Andreas was not to be found. As she was returning, she passed the gallery that opened upon the balcony, and there in the moonlight lay the king.

"Pity he has chosen the garden for his sleeping-chamber this cold night," murmured Isolda; "but he was ever a wayward child."

She then proceeded to the royal apartment.

"His majesty is sleeping below in the garden," said she to the queen; "and I know not whether to rouse him, or leave him where he is. Perchance he will meet no harm, and it may cure him of the habit."

"Nothing could have brought him to this," replied Joanna, "except the disregarding of my prayers and wishes. I am almost tempted to let him sleep on where he is. O! Andreas! —Andreas!—Those vows, those protestations, which seem but just uttered, are frail, perishing as the passing breeze!"

Philippa shuddered, and an icy coldness crept over her as she listened to the words of the nurse; and now rising hastily, she immediately sought the garden. With a terrible foreboding she approached the lifeless body. It was true—he slept indeed, but it was the sleep of Death! The arms had a helpless, drooping lassitude—the body a stiff, unnatural position—and around the neck was still the purple mark. Hastening from the fearful spot, the Catanese entered the ante-chamber where Isolda still remained waiting her return.

"Well?" said the nurse inquiringly as Philippa appeared.

"He is *dead!*" she whispered.

"*Dead!—dead!* It cannot be! I am sure that he but *slept.*"

"*There he is,*" was the reply, "with his face black and

convulsed, and a deep mark upon his neck. They have strangled him !"

Isolda, almost frantic, rushed to the garden; and Philippa entered the queen's apartment.

"Alas !" she murmured, "how can I break the fatal catastrophe to her? It may kill her !"

Joanna had now risen, and sat in a large arm-chair with a white velvet robe thrown carelessly over her night-dress, her small, undressed feet thrust into slippers, and cheeks and lips feverish with apprehension. Her eye burned with unusual brightness, and as Philippa beheld her, she hesitated to unfold the dreadful discovery.

"Speak !" cried the queen in an excited tone. "Your looks prelude some terrible disclosure—what has taken place?"

Her manner was commanding, *imperative*—still she hesitated. At length she faltered forth:

"The king is dead—murdered in the garden !"

She raised her eyes to Joanna's face; every vestige of color had passed away—no sudden emotion testified her horror—all was cold, passionless as marble. Every feature wore the same rigid look, and those usually beaming eyes were fixed upon Philippa with an expression that made her shudder. She anxiously approached to offer her assistance, but the queen calmly waved her off, and remained as though buried in thought. The Catanese could no longer support this intense anxiety; approaching Joanna, she fell on her knees beside her, and exclaimed in beseeching tones:

"Speak!—speak! utter but a word, and do not maintain that cold, rigid appearance! Answer me, lady—let me know that you still hear me!"

This address produced a softening effect upon the queen—the features relaxed, the eye lost its stony expression, and bursting into tears, she exclaimed:

"*Dead! murdered!*—sayest thou? O! Andreas! Andreas! my husband!"

The fearful tale soon spread around, and the inmates of the neighboring monastery rushed in and loudly lamented that the king had died without the rites of sacrament and confession. Taking the corpse in their arms, they conveyed it to their habitation and placed a cross in its lifeless hands, sprinkled the brow *with holy* water, and spent the night in prayers and *devotions beside it.* Useless, mocking ceremonies!

CHAPTER XIV.

LIKE a dark, overwhelming cloud, the news spread on towards the city. Towards morning, as the Hungarian guard still kept watch by the Capuan gate, a breathless messenger arrived, and as they did not seem disposed to allow him a free passage, he loudly exclaimed:

"Let me pass instantly! I bear tidings into the city that will soon raise commotion there—*the king is dead!*"

The man's horse looked jaded and worn—he himself was almost overcome with fatigue—there was no reason to suppose this story a fabrication.

"Dead!" they repeated, "he was alive and in health but yesterday."

"He was," replied the messenger, "and murdered last night."

"Murdered! and at Aversa!" exclaimed the leader. "We will immediately to Father Roberto, and inform him of the catastrophe. That Italian squire has some hand in it, now that I call to mind his eagerness to pass the gate on a certain hour that very night, and his frantic resistance at being detained. Keep a strict watch upon him—he is a Neapolitan."

They advanced in a body to the palace where Father Roberto held his unpriestly revels, but the abandoned friar was so overcome by the effects of the last night's debauch as to be unable for some time to comprehend the tale. But at last they succeeded in making him understand that the oppressed and desperate Italians had risen in a body and murdered Andreas; and, as Naples was no longer a safe harbor for them, they must immediately fly, or dread the vengeance of their exasperated enemies.

The blow was sudden, unexpected and overwhelming; the monk had calculated on a greater degree of power than ever from the approaching coronation of his pupil, and it did not at all agree with his plans to be obliged to leave Naples thus

speedily. The plot which he had overheard had lately been quite driven from his mind by drinking and revelling, but it now occurred to him as a sure means of revenge. He resolved to remain in the city, no less to secure his precious effects than to witness the downfall of the Catanese; it was at least a comfort to know that, although he was ruined, the reign of Philippa was now at an end.

"There is an Italian squire," said the leader, "whom we have often noticed hanging about the court, and last night, the very night of the murder, he rode furiously up to the gate and demanded leave to pass. When we refused him, he insisted with so much violence that we were obliged to place him in custody. He has ever since been in a burning fever, and raves continually of some fearful secret that must be disclosed. As he is an Italian, all this looks suspicious, and we wait your orders to know what to do with him."

"Who is his master?" inquired the friar.

"The fiery marshal, Count Giacomo Capanno," was the reply.

"Ha!" exclaimed Father Roberto, "this is indeed well! He was of course concerned in the murder, and the lowest dungeon shall reward his villainy till he can be brought to the torture."

It was the monk himself who placed Gaetano, delirious as he was, upon the hard pallet, and turned the key in the door with fiendish satisfaction.

When Beatrice Vivaldi returned, she hastened to seek her father, but he was not there! In distressing apprehension she questioned the servants, and they confirmed her fears, by telling her that he went out as soon as she had left the house. She called to mind his mysterious journey in the morning, when he met the conspirators at the islet, and the sleep in which he had feigned to be buried when she left. He intended to deceive her, or he would not have counterfeited sleep; and while she dwelt on his late hypocritical conduct, Beatrice wept bitter, scalding tears, as she reflected that she was, probably ere now, the daughter of a *murderer*.

As the first beams of day were gilding the city, Vivaldi returned with a harassed, guilty countenance, disordered hair, and bearing the marks of a sleepless night. He avoided her eye as his daughter shrank from his touch.

"You are right, Beatrice," said he; "why should contamination reach the innocent? You are far too pure-minded, girl, to be the daughter of a murderer."

She started at this, and repeated the word "murderer." It had been ringing in her ears ever since her return.

"'Tis false!" shouted Vivaldi; "I uttered no such word! It is only a well-laid scheme of your own, that you may entrap and get rid of a father, over whose wealth you have long laid a covetous eye. But take care, unnatural girl, that you bring not down on your own head the fate you would design for others!"

Beatrice shuddered at this strange address; but her fear soon changed to pity, as she beheld that her father's countenance wore a vacant, bewildered look, and his senses had evidently forsaken him. She gently conveyed him to a couch, and for many days and nights the affectionate daughter watched by the bedside of that guilty man.

In the meantime all was confusion and dismay at Aversa. The party of Hungarians who had followed the king were struck with fear and horror; and dreading instant retribution, they fled to the city to join their companions. The whole body soon after evacuated the city, and Father Roberto and a few others only remained. The friar had judged it expedient to quit the palace, and choose a retired residence with one of the remaining band, where his retreat would be hardly known.

The remainder of that fearful night Philippa spent in the queen's apartment; every moment she could spare from her mistress being devoted to preparations for their instant departure. Joanna could no longer remain in the place where the fearful tragedy had been perpetrated, and at times seemed almost on the verge of despair. The Countess Terlizi maintained an unremitting post by her bedside, while Philippa made all necessary arrangements. The next day they returned to the city sadly and with drooping hearts; how different from the feelings with which they had left Naples. *Then* all was bright and joyous; a glittering cavalcade followed; brave knights and jewelled ladies had swelled the train: *now* all was silence, gloom, and despair.

They immediately repaired to the Castel-Novo, and there for some days the young queen shut herself up, and gave way unrestrainedly to grief, refusing to see any of the numerous nobles

who paid her visits of condolence. A short time after Joanna gave birth to a son, and in the smiles of the infant she seemed to lose the poignancy of her grief.

As soon as the queen was able to receive them, a deputation of the Neapolitan nobility waited upon her to devise some measures for the arrest of the murderers. The hall was long, and hung with black from respect to the memory of Andreas; their faces wore the look of men determined to show no mercy, and the solemn silence was unbroken by the assembled conclave.

As the young and lovely queen entered, with the tears gathering in her soft eyes, a suppressed murmur of pity ran through the assembly; and respectfully saluting their sovereign, they took their seats at the long, business-like table. For a few moments there was unbroken stillness; Joanna had buried her face in her hands, and was sobbing aloud, as that fearful catastrophe rushed in all its vividness upon her mind—dark, terrible, mysterious; and the funeral hangings and solemn quiet struck a chill into the hearts of all. Not a word had been spoken; all hesitated to disturb the grief of their sovereign; but at length the queen herself, raising her head and driving back the flowing tears, motioned them to proceed.

"You have witnessed the weakness of a woman, my lords and nobles, whose tears are in a fair way of causing her to forget the queen. Instead of giving way to useless lamentations, we should endeavor to further, with effective aid, such measures as may be resolved on for the apprehension and punishment of the murderers."

There was a choking sensation as she pronounced the last word in a scarcely audible tone; and the stern barons were moved as they saw that Joanna was scarcely able to support the intensity of the feelings they would be obliged to arouse.

"Your majesty is aware," said Count Hugh del Balzo, "of the feelings entertained by a portion of the Neapolitan nobility towards the late king; also that the Hungarians were the most attached of his followers—that is, attached to their own interests, which would prevent them from striking a blow which has suddenly sent them from the kingdom. Muttered discontent, and rumors of plots and conspiracies have been overheard, which renders it certain that the king fell by the hands of a desperate party of Italians who had long been resolved on the

measure. Nothing could stop these men from the accomplishment of their purpose; and the fact is corroborated by the flight of the grand marshal, who has not been seen since that fatal night, thus tacitly confessing his guilt."

"What!" exclaimed the queen, "the Count Capanno! We placed implicit confidence in him, and though rough in manner, considered him a faithful subject. I would not that he should be discovered as one of the—"

The word remained unfinished, being choked by sobs; and another baron remarked:

"The grand marshal went not alone, being accompanied by the Count de Artugio and his son Count Beltrame. It is whispered that they have found an asylum in France."

"Ay," rejoined one of the nobles, in a low tone; "they were ever intimate, and must needs come to the scaffold together. The two most effective characters in a black conspiracy; the grand marshal bold, violent, and hot-blooded; d'Artugio, cool, calculating, and decided."

"D'Artugio, our kinsman and friend!" repeated Joanna, more sadly than ever. "Can it indeed be true, that he should lend himself to this vile plot? We placed Andreas under his care on that terrible night, to be guarded from the temptations of the banquet-table; little did we deem that he would thus fulfil his trust! it is indeed sad to have those whom we considered friends unmasked as enemies; we doubted not d'Artugio's loyalty."

"Their loyalty to Joanna was not extended to the king, whom they regarded as an interloper," remarked one of the barons bluntly; "and this same d'Artugio, being himself of the blood royal, could not tolerate the idea of a foreign prince. Though had it not been for the Hungarians, all might yet be well."

The queen shuddered; she felt that the friar had indeed been the cause of her present misery, and her dislike and dread was not merely a fanciful prejudice.

"There are many others," said the Count de Balzo; "the band appears to have been formidable in number. Raimondo da Napoli has also fled the kingdom; and the two chamberlains, Tommaso and Masolo da Bologna must have been implicated in the plot, although they have returned to their posts as though nothing had taken place. They probably opened

the door of the king's chamber to the murderers, and assisted in concealing them. We have marked them, and the torture will soon bring them to speedy confession. There is the squire of the grand marshal, who was imprisoned by the Hungarian guard, on a suspicion of being connected with the conspiracy, as he behaved most strangely on the night of the murder, insisting on passing through the gate to Aversa, and using arms to enforce his demand. He was known to be strongly attached to his master, and this conduct is, to say the least, suspicious; he is therefore still in prison to await his trial."

"And all this while," said Joanna, "we have been in the midst of enemies, whom we considered as faithful and attached subjects! Deceit and hypocrisy are breathed in the atmosphere of a court." She continued bitterly—"We shall soon be at a loss where to put our trust, fearful of having it abused."

"Your majesty wrongs us!" exclaimed the assembled nobles, feeling this as a stinging rebuke. "We have ever been faithful to the crown from the time it graced the head of King Robert; and through storms and troubles, through good and evil, we will be faithful still!"

"I meant not to wrong you, mine old and well-tried friends," replied the queen, with one of those fascinating smiles that immediately soothed the passions of those around. "I meant not to wrong you—and if I have done so, it shows that my mind is strangely bewildered. It is, indeed, overwhelming to hear tales of baseness and duplicity in those whom we have hitherto trusted."

"Your majesty," resumed Hugh del Balzo, "must now select from this assembly one in whom you can place the greatest confidence, to represent the office of queen's agent in this important work. With your majesty's written orders, seal, and signet-ring to enforce his measures, he need not despair of being able to bring all the conspirators to punishment."

Joanna looked around upon the assembled barons, and though all were respectful and devoted, she feared to offend them by preferring one before another—for the young sovereign had already learned the value of *friends;* therefore she replied:

"Where all seem alike faithful and competent, 'tis hard to

point out one who would best discharge the duty; therefore, my lords, you must decide the matter among yourselves. We shall approve any whom you may appoint."

A short consultation among the nobles followed; and finally Count del Balzo was named as the most efficient agent. The queen testified her assent, and del Balzo, placing writing materials before her, requested her written orders.

"What am I required to do?" asked Joanna apprehensively.

"Your majesty," was the reply, "will please express the royal wishes as to the measures that are to be taken, and invest your agent with full power to apprehend, and bring to punishment or trial any whom he may suspect."

She was then required to act the part of judge—to doom to death the trembling miscreants who were seeking safety in concealment and flight. Her hand would be the one to drag them forth from fancied security to suffer cruel tortures and death on the scaffold; would not their blood be upon her head? Would not their cries henceforth disturb her slumbers? Her soul revolted from the task; and pushing the parchment from her, she faintly murmured:

"I cannot!"

A surprised silence ensued, till Hugh del Balzo, again arranging the implements, remarked:

"Your majesty must endeavor to bury the emotions of the *woman* in the just anger of the wife and queen. The crime which has been perpetrated should meet with a punishment calculated to intimidate others from making the same attempt, or the safety of the kingdom will be endangered."

Joanna made an attempt to shake off those uncomfortable sensations, and taking the pen she wrote according to their dictation, being scarcely conscious of what she put down. When finished and passed among the nobles, it read thus:

"We, the sovereign of Naples, Provence, and Piedmont, do here endow our faithful subject and minister, Count Hugh del Balzo with full power to trace out and punish the conspirators engaged in the late murder of our royal consort, Andreas Prince of Hungary. To any found guilty of the above crime no mercy is to be shown—the torture and scaffold shall reward their baseness. We do hereby

affix our royal seal and signature. Signed: Joanna, the Queen."

The hand of the young queen trembled as she traced these lines, and her heart seemed to revoke the sentence just passed; but a grim smile of satisfaction sat on the faces of her ministers, and they made immediate preparations for carrying it into effect.

"Now," resumed del Balzo, "I must request your majesty's signet-ring, that on our return it may remind the queen of her promise, should her heart be disposed to relent."

With a secret misgiving Joanna slipped the jewel from her slender finger and delivered it to the agent. Suspending it to a gold chain upon his neck, he placed it in his bosom; and, with an assurance to the queen of speedy success, the assembly broke up. As Joanna retired to her apartment, she experienced a heavy weight upon her heart—a gloomy, dismal foreboding that seemed to predict trials still in store.

The nobles were vigilant and untiring in their exertions; they established spies and secret companies in the various sections of the city, whose business it was to watch and inspect all that took place around, and at stated times make a report to their employers.

As one of these parties was one night posted at a deserted corner, the Count del Balzo stopped to give them further instructions as he passed on to his residence. His sharp eye detected a dark mass moving in an adjacent corner; and, ever on the alert to unfold mysteries, he advanced boldly to the man, who, perceiving his intention, also approached till they met half-way.

"Thy business?" said del Balzo, imperatively. "Men are not watched and followed so without design, but I fear thee not—for if thy purpose be evil, I have a stout band on the corner, and the valuables I carry about me will afford thee but little spoil."

"Count Hugh del Balzo," replied his companion in a concealed voice, "I know thee well—the purpose which brings thee hither, and also that thou hast about thy person a treasure that would reward a greater risk than this."

"Name it," rejoined del Balzo, his curiosity being roused by this abrupt address, and direct acknowledgment of his name.

"Name the treasure with which thou seemest to be so well acquainted."

"*The queen's signet-ring.*"

Del Balzo started at this bold avowal, and turning to his companion, exclaimed:

"Art thou fiend or wizard, thus to penetrate men's secrets?"

"Neither," was the reply, "but thy most humble servant, sir Count."

Thus saying, he threw aside his cloak, and, as the bright beams of the moon fell full upon his features, the astonished noble ejaculated:

"The monk! by all that's evil! We deemed that we were fairly rid of him!"

"Thy thoughts have, it seems, misled thee, most noble sir; but thy words are far from courteous in speaking of one of the holy profession."

"A truce to thy hypocrisy!" exclaimed del Balzo, fiercely. "Tell me, instantly, what brought thee hither, or by the holy mass! thy life were not worth much! The reign of insolence is over now—the power is *mine.*"

Father Roberto winced under these words; but, resolved not to lose sight of his own interest, he continued:

"I have met thy words in meekness, Count del Balzo, and shall make thee no hasty rejoinder. My purpose to-night should meet with more respect—'tis to render justice where it should be rendered, and expose the guilty. For this I have remained in Naples, and will continue here until it is performed."

"To wash out the sins of a life-time by one good act, holy father!" was the sneering reply.

The monk kept his anger to himself and continued:

"The interest which we Hungarians feel in the catastrophe that befel our late master will not allow our vigilance to sleep any more than that of the the Neapolitans, and I came here, to-night, sir Count, to give thee a clew whereby thou mayest bring to speedy justice the foremost of the conspirators. Promise me not to divulge that I am still here, and to allow me a safe departure, and I will unfold their names."

"I promise," said his companion, hastily; "proceed."

"The grand marshal was the head of the band—he has

fled the kingdom. With him were implicated the Count d' Artugio and his son, Count Tralizzo, Count Marcome, Merser Cafferello, Raimondo da Napoli, the two chamberlains, the goldsmith Vivaldi, the squire of the grand marshal, and the Countess of Montoni—or, as she is more generally known, Philippa, the Catanese."

"The Countess of Montoni!" replied del Balzo. "What had a woman to do with this plot? She had few friends among the conspirators."

"It matters not what," said the friar, impatiently; "put the two chamberlains to the torture and they will soon confess it to be true. This Vivaldi is now at his own residence, where a strong guard had better be sent to secure him; and, his daughter, if not implicated in it, is at least well informed of the whole plot."

Del Balzo meditated for a few moments, and then concluded that it would be more politic to treat Father Roberto with civility for the present, and offer him a safe residence in Naples until the murderers were discovered and punished, that he might give his evidence at the trials—naturally supposing that he could have no motive beyond what he had stated for giving the information thus volunteered. While the Neapolitan was congratulating himself on thus easily accomplishing his purpose, Father Roberto saw that *his* revenge was certain; and they parted well pleased on both sides.

With a trembling heart and pale cheek, Isoldina, having at length entreated, threatened, and bribed the key from his rigorous jailor, proceeded along the passage that led to Gaetano's dungeon. It was night; and the damp air caused the light she held to flicker and waver as if just going out, until she began to despair of ever reaching the cell. At length she saw one that answered the description given, turned the key in the lock, and entered.

She beheld a thin, wasted figure extended upon a straw pallet, and approached closer to ascertain if it were really Gaetano. It was—but so changed and altered that she could hardly recognise him. He was in an uneasy slumber, and as Isoldina parted the straggling hair from his brow, she beheld

a haggard countenance, pale cheeks, and bloodless lips. Could this be Gaetano, her heart's idol?—he, who had left her in the full bloom of manly beauty? She sat down by the bedside, and as she took his hand in hers warm tears fell upon it. He turned uneasily; and as he woke, his eyes fell upon an unaccustomed sight. In place of the rough jailor, he beheld that delicate girl—she, who filled his sleeping and his waking hours—she, the beloved, innocent cause of his present situation.

"Isoldina!" he murmured, as his pale features lighted up with hope and love; "Isoldina, thou art come at last!—blessed be the cause that brought thee here!"

"Revoke those words, Gaetano," replied the girl sadly, without raising her eyes to his face. "Disgrace, and torture, and death are *not* 'blessed means'—they brought me here!"

"Again I repeat, 'blessed be the cause,' whatever it is, that brought *thee* here, Isoldina! The end thou hast mentioned, I have looked forward to ever since I entered this gloomy place; but if I suffer, it will be unjustly, Isoldina—I am innocent! What message hast thou brought?"

"I am sent to bid thee prepare for the torture! They would bring thee to a confession extorted by racking pain; for well do I know that thou art innocent—as well as I know myself to be the cause of thy present misery. Once before hast thou perilled life for me, Gaetano, and now—"

She buried her face in her hands, and hot tears came trickling through the slender fingers. The young girl wept in all the agony of a noble mind, as she beheld the object of her dearest love delivered up to death and through *her* means.

He was hardly prepared for her announcement; and for a moment convulsively grasped the meagre covering, and buried himself beneath it, as if unwilling that *she* should witness his anguish.

"I knew not, Isoldina," said he at length, "that thou wast aware of the cause which has brought me hither. But blame not thyself, dear one, for although it was the promise of that fair hand that first induced me to play the spy upon my master, yet as I discovered that those fearful suspicions were indeed correct, nothing would have hindered me from saving the king's life. I should regard myself as his mur-

derer had I done otherwise, Isoldina—for wherein consists the difference between him who deals the blow, and one who coolly looks on without offering to rescue the victim? They may torture me, but it will be in vain; they will not even extort the truth from me—for my master was a kind one, and I would screen his guilt, at least, till assured of his safety."

"Gaetano!" exclaimed the girl, grasping his arm in the earnestness of her entreaty, "thou dost not mean this! They will certainly murder thee in their ferocity; and this will be thy reward for screening a perjured traitor, who has acknowledged his guilt by flying from the kingdom! Nothing can preserve thy life but instant and open confession of the whole truth."

"Fled from the kingdom!" he repeated. "Now may the Virgin aid him! for never again can the Count Capanno boast the honor of knighthood. A dreary life-time banishment from his native country, or a lingering and disgraceful death awaits him. Oh, my master! little did I think to see thee thus!"

"The city is in a fearful state, Gaetano; spies are stationed at every corner, ready to seize upon any suspected and hurry them to prison, while the Count del Balzo, with the queen's signet-ring, possesses the power to enforce any orders, however stern. All are trembling in fear of being seized as murderers, and my mother daily pines for the death of her foster-son. I fear she will not long survive him. The poor young queen sits for hours with her infant in her arms, while all whom she most loves she gathers in her chamber, and a wild expression crosses her face if they leave her for a single instant."

"And the king? What became of his remains?"

"They lay for several days in the Celestine monastery under the care of the monks; he seemed to be entirely forgotten in the dismay that followed, till a short time ago an Italian gentleman, Ursolo Minutolo, had it conveyed to Naples, and interred in the chapel of St. Louis. 'Twas a solemn and a mournful day when the funeral procession of the murdered king wound through the city where he had so lately passed in life and health."

"Isoldina," said the young Italian, with a deep and tender earnestness, "from the very first a dark shadow—an embodiment of difficulties and dangers, has come between us and our

love, but it is still the same. Months, years have passed—years of doubt and sadness, but it is still with us like a gleam of sunshine across our clouded path, beautiful, spiritual as at first. In the midst of darkness and distress it has passed before me like a steady, cheering light; and here, surrounded by gloom and scenes of fear and horror—here upon my pallet in a damp, close prison, I feel that when all these trials are safely passed, happiness will yet be ours."

"Never!" replied the young girl, firmly, with the calm light of resignation beaming in her eyes; "here on the threshold of suffering and death, do not deceive thyself, Gaetano, with brilliant imaginings never to be realized. The very difficulties and dangers that cluster around it have stamped our love as no common love; let it be a pure, ethereal creation to guide thee through rending trials—burning like the clear beams of a pale, silvery star that points to that far-off bourne where, in the spiritual world, it will bloom with celestial beauty. Let this thought cheer thee in thy gloomy imprisonment, but I cannot see thee deceiving thyself, Gaetano, with feverish imaginings. And, now, farewell; perhaps we may meet no more on earth—perhaps—"

There was a low, convulsive sob as, falling on her knees, she bent her head on the side of the couch, and placed her lips on those cold, pale hands. For a moment she remained in this position, with her long, dark hair falling round her like a cloud, and her hands clasped over the tearful eyes. Then rising, she took the lamp, and with one last, lingering glance that seemed to inspire his soul with new courage, she left the dungeon.

CHAPTER XV.

All was confusion at the palace. A brooding fear sat on all around, and conversation was almost hushed to a whisper, as though they feared to give utterance to aught that might subject them to the torture. The queen remained in her own apartment, and scarcely ventured beyond its precincts, fearful of encountering some scene of misery. Father Roberto, by cunning and communications of pretended importance, had again glided into the palace, like an evil spirit, to gloat over the misery and sufferings of others. As he stole noiselessly about, half-concealed in the folds of his robe, a cold shudder passed through those who came in contact with him—and, with suppressed pleasure, he marked the awe and dread which his presence still inspired. His reign was not then over, as the haughty Italian had announced; like Samson, his strength was still preserved in full vigor to deal a last, levelling blow upon his enemies—when they had supposed him subdued, crushed like a mighty oak in the devastating storm.

"The saints aid and preserve us!" exclaimed one of the trembling group. "We know not who may be seized next! The guards are even now leading forth some one to the torture. Stand aside—it chills my very blood to brush even against the hem of their garments!"

"One!" replied the person addressed, "by the holy cross! 'tis not one, but *two*. And those the king's chamberlains, Fommaso and Masolo da Bologna! Surely they are not suspected? Why, their faces are of a ghastly white, and the dark locks of hair hang upon their brows damp and clinging, as though with inward anguish!"

"More than *suspected*," said one of the guards; "but the torture will soon bring all to light. Be cautious, good people, that ye bring not yourselves into a similar predicament, and, above all, allow not too free a license to your tongues."

They passed on, the guards and their prisoners, and those who were so inclined followed to the place of torture. Father

Roberto stood by the side of the guilty men, and as their features were distorted by pain, and their bodies writhing in agony too great for human endurance, he whispered his fiendish counsels in their ear.

"Confess," said he to Masolo da Bologna, "acknowledge that Philippa, the Catanese, was implicated in the plot, and alike guilty with the rest; confess this and thy release is certain."

"Alas!" replied the suffering man, "my brain is burning, and I scarcely know what I do, but how can I deliver up the innocent? Air! air!" he murmured; "do not stand so close! Wouldst thou trouble the last moments of a dying man?"

"Do as I have said," replied the friar, "or it will be the worse for thee!"

They were again about to apply the torture, when in a tremulous voice the chamberlain exclaimed: "Stop! stop!—I will confess!"

"And a heavy burden is on thy conscience too, I'll warrant," said the executioner, "which nothing but the torture would have removed."

He proceeded and confessed the whole plot, acknowledged the share which he himself had in it, named the other conspirators, and as the monk's keen eye fell upon him, repeated the name of Philippa. When he had finished, he was immediately condemned, with his brother, to suffer upon the scaffold; and at the friar's instigation, he was removed for instant punishment—who feared that if allowed time he might repent of his last sin, and revoke the much-desired confession. Thus died the guilty man, with a falsehood upon his lips.

A SWEET and quiet scene of domestic happiness was that retired chamber in the royal palace. In one corner stood a small, richly-ornamented couch, containing a sleeping infant; the velvet mantle thrown over it rose and fell with its regular breathings, and one tiny hand that lay upon the coverlet was tightly closed, as though grasping some imaginary treasure. There was naught save the costly attire, the rich lace robe, and the splendor by which it was surrounded, to distinguish it as the child of royalty; a crown with royal arms was wrought

upon the head of the couch, but the velvet cheek was round and glowing, the lips tinted with the hue of an opening rose, and the little slumberer as unconscious of the weighty cares attached to that golden trinket as the child of the rugged, hard-working peasant. Kneeling beside it was a young mother, with a soft radiance beaming in her large eyes that told of a love pure, unselfish and self-sacrificing.

"See!" said she to Philippa, "is he not beautiful?"

The queen placed her hand on that of the child, and the little fingers closed over it tightly with a tenacious grasp.

"He loves me, Philippa!" she murmured, while a beautiful smile lit up her face.

There was a sound of steps along the corridor, and they were heavy and numerous. They approached the royal apartment, and the queen turned to Philippa for an explanation, who listened in silent foreboding. Each solemn, measured tread fell upon her ear like a funeral knell. Without the usual respectful observances the door was flung open, and a body of the palace guards entered the chamber, with swords unsheathed as to guard a prisoner, and at their head was the Count del Balzo. A sunbeam kissed the brow of the sleeping infant, and as they passed it fell upon the flashing steel, where it glanced and played like a well-pleased child.

"What means this intrusion, my lord?" demanded Joanna, with that sternness which she well knew how to assume, but which seemed not natural to the lips that could wreathe with such heavenly smiles. "What means this intrusion into our royal apartments, with a train of booted followers? This disrespect to thy sovereign is but idle mirth, Count del Balzo, and we command thee instantly to leave our presence, and display those naked swords in a more fitting place. They are powerful weapons, methinks, to be used against defenceless women."

"It is no want of respect," replied del Balzo, "that has brought me thus unceremoniously into your majesty's presence. I come to arrest the guilty who have too long rested in security."

"The *guilty!*" repeated the queen angrily, as a frown gathered on her brow, and the eyes expressed royal displeasure. "The *guilty!* Nay, sir count, thy excuse is even worse than the fault itself. And is it in the *queen's* chamber thou

wouldst look for the guilty? Which of us is it on whom the worthy lord would lay the burden of this guilt? Perchance it may be the son of his sovereign—heir to the crown of Naples?"

As Joanna uttered these words in a bitter tone, she withdrew the velvet coverlid, and the child suddenly opening its eyes, smiled sweetly on the stern-looking men around its couch. Del Balzo hesitated a moment as he saw that the soldiers were visibly affected; then turning towards the queen, he continued:

"Your majesty must graciously forgive any seeming disrespect in the execution of my orders, and believe me to be actuated solely by a sense of duty."

Then in a loud, distinct voice he exclaimed:

"Philippa, Countess of Montoni, I arrest thee in the name of my sovereign, on the charge of high treason against the late king, and wilfully aiding and abetting his murder."

It seemed as though an icy hand were suddenly laid upon her heart that chilled her through and through. Philippa stood as one turned to stone, and neither spoke nor moved.

But Joanna, with flashing eyes, turned to the haughty noble and exclaimed:

"Miscreant! how darest thou thus insult the friends of thy sovereign, and make use of her name in so base a cause! Revoke the charge but now made, and then depart instantly! And never let me behold thee again, thou false knight and subject! How darest thou prate of authority in the presence of the queen?"

The angry blood crimsoned the face of del Balzo at this humbling address, and he vouchsafed no reply to Joanna; but taking the signet-ring from his bosom, he held up it before her like an accusing witness. She saw it; the bright, fiery jewel seemed eating into her very heart—and overcome with grief and horror, she threw herself beside her infant, and burst into tears.

Philippa had now recovered from her surprise, and with all the dignity of a proud spirit, she confronted her accuser, and boldly avowed her innocence.

"Prove the crime with which thou hast charged me, my

lord del Balzo," said she. "I am most innocent of the charge."

"It is not for me to prove," he replied; "it is but for me to deliver thee up to a just and exact court, who will faithfully examine every point of the case, and do unto thee according to thy merits or demerits. Mayest thou return with a name spotless and untarnished, is the wish I wish thee, lady, but much I fear that the result will not be in thy favor. The evidence of living as well as of dead witnesses is against thee, and men are not apt to die with a falsehood upon their lips. The two chamberlains have confessed, and thy name was among the conspirators; upon this authority I arrest thee."

"Evidence!" exclaimed Philippa bitterly. "Ay! I can well understand the evidence! It is that of an arch-fiend who has long since plotted my ruin, and the incoherent words of dying men whom the torture has well nigh crazed. Is this the evidence, Count del Balzo, that is to convict an innocent woman? Bethink thee well of it, my lord, for the crime may rest heavy on thy soul; and in attempting to render justice to others, thou wilt blast thine own happiness forever. Was not the villainous friar one of thine informers? Answer me instantly, sir!—I will not bear trifling upon this point, and I know that he is still skulking about the palace; and not because of shame is this secrecy, for he was ever undaunted in his wickedness, but that he may work mischief the more easily."

From the proud bearing of Philippa, and her full, searching gaze, a spectator would have inferred her to be the accuser, and the awed noble before her the trembling criminal.

Del Balzo mechanically replied in the affirmative to her question, and then pursued the train of thinking which it had aroused. Might not the friar be, as she had insinuated, merely actuated by motives of revenge to work her ruin? The idea had something of probability in it, for hitherto he had never cared to perform disinterested actions, and had altogether disregarded the claims of justice. What then had prompted this sudden fit of goodness but revenge? But then, on the other hand, the words of a dying man were a powerful and accusing evidence; *he* could be moved by no motives of revenge, and the charge, even if not true, was well grounded, and demanded careful investigation. Therefore he

determined to place the Catanese in custody to await a further trial, and again repeated the form of arrest.

But the queen, springing forward, caught her robe, as she cried:

"Touch her at thy peril, Count del Balzo! She is innocent, and I, the queen, am ready to support her! Ye will hardly present arms against your sovereign," she continued, turning to the guards; "and, therefore, she is safe under the royal protection. But, as for thee, Count del Balzo, we see through thy treachery now! Under an appearance of pretended zeal, thou hast falsely obtained our signet-ring, of which we demand instant restoration, and lent thyself to a plot for achieving the ruin of the innocent. We have a mind to arrest *thee*, sir Count, for treason to thy sovereign."

Del Balzo, as he restored the ring, leaned towards Joanna and whispered something that seemed to paralyze every faculty. She stood like a beautiful statue, with arms hanging listlessly down, eyes fixed and glaring, and rigid, colorless lips. He had put in whispered form a dark, dim suspicion that floated around, to which none dared give utterance. Although he believed the young queen to be perfectly innocent, he told her that this shielding of her favorite exposed her name more than ever to the slander of vile tongues.

"Lead on, my lord," said the Catanese, with an imperative wave of the hand, as though addressing a vassal; "lead on, to the prison, I suppose. But if justice be not shamefully perverted, the cloud which hangs over my name will soon vanish, and I shall return free from the slanders that are now heaped upon me."

Then kneeling down, she reverently kissed the hand of Joanna as she whispered:

"Farewell, for the present, dear lady and sovereign; they will not dare condemn the innocent, and in a gloomy prison the memory of thy kindness will cheer many a lonely hour."

"And *love*, Philippa," said the queen, tenderly, "for as few are loved do I love thee. Thou hast ever been faithful, devoted and respectful, and with my latest breath will I repeat thy virtues. They may unlawfully condemn thee, Philippa, but through imprisonment and suffering, through misfortune, gloom and misery, may thy sovereign's love fall like a bright-

ening gleam upon thy heart. And now, mine old and faithful friend, farewell."

The tears were raining from Joanna's eyes, and trembled like dew-drops in the orbs of Philippa.

"Count del Balzo," said the queen, sternly, as she drew him aside, "receive now our express orders that the Countess of Montoni be treated with the respect due to her rank. As regards the foul suspicion so vilely breathed against her, we give no ear to these slanderous reports; and, after a short and unjust detention, we shall expect her to return entirely free from these accusations. Thy sovereign's commands are that the torture be not used to force a confession that would otherwise remain untold. Bear this in mind, sir Count, and if our orders are disobeyed, thou wilt be answerable to us."

"There are others yet to be secured," said del Balzo; "I see not the Countess Terlizi—her name is included among the accused. Wait, guards, until the prisoners are brought forward."

"What!" exclaimed Philippa, with a bitter laugh; "is she, too, suspected? Truly, ye are wise gentlemen, to seize the whole family of one suspected of so great a crime—I could not have accomplished it alone. There, Giacinta," she continued, addressing a terrified female attendant, "bid the lady Sancha come hither, instantly. She is wanted to accompany me on a journey; and, if she asks whither, tell her all will be explained afterwards. Hasten, girl, the worshipful company are impatient to exercise their valor."

Not wishing to encounter another scene in the royal chambers, del Balzo, led instead of being followed by his prisoner, passed quickly into the corridor. There they met the Countess Terlizi, who, pale and speechless, had scarcely strength to assert her innocence, as Philippa unfolded to her the cause of their extraordinary arrest. Things were dark and discouraging; but, secure in the power of conscious innocence, the two females passed on, and were shown to a gloomy dungeon. One consolation still remained in their misfortune—they were not separated, and even for this they were thankful.

Joanna burst into a passionate flood of tears as the door closed upon them; something seemed to tell her that she had seen Philippa for the last time—that henceforth her life would be uncheered by sympathising, devoted love. She hated her-

self for admitting such doubts, but the Count del Balzo had cited the evidence of a dying man against Philippa, and could one just trembling on the verge of the grave be willing to go to his last account with a falsehood upon his lips? It was cruelly bewildering, and the young queen knew not what to think; much as circumstances were against her, she could not believe her favorite guilty of this terrible crime; she only knew that henceforth she must gather up within her own heart that love which had been disposed to lavish itself on all around. She only knew that she must live desolate—alone; openness and unguardedness were not for a court; she must learn to become suspicious—to spy upon the conduct of others, and when all seemed most fair and open, then most to dread the evil that might lie concealed beneath. It was a bitter task for one so young.

By the sick man's bedside still sat that devoted daughter. He was now free from delirium—he had recognized her, even pressed her hand to his lips, too weak to thank her, as it wandered among the tangled locks in the attempt to shed some degree of comfort around the sick couch. The future she dared not look forward to—her spirit was bowed with shame, but through all, the devoted girl remembered that he was her father still.

There was a loud noise at the door, the wringing of spurs upon the pavement, and a sound of many voices. The guilty man heard them, and kept his eyes closed to blot out the dreadful reality. Beatrice thought he still slept, and though a pallid hue overspread her cheeks as the armed officers entered the apartment, she still remained calm.

Pointing to the couch, she whispered:

"He sleeps; perchance it is the sleep of death."

"Not so," replied one of the guards, as he cast a glance upon sleeper; "he is yet reserved for the scaffold, and if he sleeps we must e'en wake him."

"Would ye wake a sick man to carry him to prison!" exclaimed Beatrice indignantly. "Ye have not even proved his guilt, but condemn him on suspicion! What charge have ye against him?"

"That of murder," replied the man, a little subdued; "but we will wait until he awakes, if it be not long."

The guards surrounded the house of Vivaldi; and Beatrice wept long and bitterly, as she reflected upon the overthrow of all their happiness.

As her father wildly opened his eyes, she exclaimed:

"They have come! and even now surround the house like birds of prey awaiting their victim!"

"Who have come?" replied Vivaldi. "Wretched girl! hast thou at length denounced thy father as a murderer? —didst tell them that I was *guilty?*" he added in a hoarse whisper.

"No, no!" replied Beatrice, "I told them nothing; but they say, my father, that thou art charged with *murder*—that of which thou hast so often raved in thy delirium."

"And so they would execute a man," said he, "for idle words spoken when he had not command of his senses! They may come in, and I will follow them, but I will sell my life dearly!"

Beatrice did not even doubt his guilt; but he was her *father*, and she could not bear the thought of his meeting the punishment his crime merited. Again they entered the chamber in quest of their prisoner, and this time he boldly confronted them as he said:

"What brings you hither to disturb the slumbers of a sick man?"

"We have come to arrest thee, Matteo Vivaldi, on a charge of murder and treason against thy sovereign," replied their leader.

"Truly, a weighty charge!" said Vivaldi. "Thou hast need of proof to substantiate this," he continued; "why is such an accusation made against me?"

"On the evidence of thy confederates," was the reply, "who are awaiting punishment for this crime, and some have already suffered it. But this is trifling!" said the man impatiently; "I arrest thee, and thy daughter, on the before-mentioned charge, and will lead ye forth where it shall be well substantiated."

"She is innocent, exclaimed Vivaldi; "too innocent and pure-minded for scenes like this—therefore touch her not at your peril!"

"Innocent, or not innocent," replied the leader, "she must come with us. If not implicated in the guilt of her father, she can, perhaps, throw some light on the plot."

"My father," said Beatrice, "whither thou goest I will go. Let me share with thee the gloom of a prison—I cannot live here alone. It is useless to oppose me; nothing on earth shall separate us."

The filial affection of the young girl conquered, and the two went forth together.

It was a hall of justice. Around, were dark draperies that cast a chill upon the heart from their very sombreness; and when a passing breeze stirred their heavy folds, it seemed as though shapeless phantoms were rushing to and fro. In one corner were instruments of torture, on which the eyes of the prisoners often dwelt with that fixed gaze which is bestowed on a fearful object, as though fascinated by its very horror. There were an assemblage of cold, stern-looking men, whose garments harmonized with the dreary, hopeless hue of the hangings, that seemed placed there as if to blot all hope from the hearts of those who gazed upon them; and around the apartment a sea of faces, that looked upon the misery of others with stoical indifference.

There was an opening in the crowd, and two females advanced, strictly guarded by the armed attendants. One, a woman of splendid, queenly form, whose dark, flashing eyes seemed to dart glances of scorn upon the gazing multitude as she coldly surveyed them—the other, pale, timid, and shrinking from the coarse observation of those around. There were not many in that crowd to pity them; they were not Hungarians, 'tis true, but the exaltation of Philippa from so humble a station to an office of trust and honor, had given great umbrage to the haughty nobles, and some even rejoiced at her downfall. Count Terlizi, the husband of the Lady Sancha, had also been arrested, and was now awaiting his trial in a separate prison.

Philippa proudly advanced, with the bearing of a queen, and placed herself before her judges. Her haughty air was not calculated to prepossess them in her favor; when we behold an object whom we have hated, dreaded, and regarded

with a sensation of awe—a feeling of inferiority, crushed, humbled at our very feet, we are disposed to forget the past and take the supplicant into favor. But the Catanese evinced a defying spirit, that seemed to say, "Nothing shall humble me;" and even at her trial bore herself towards her judges as though *they* had asked for mercy.

"Philippa, Countess of Montoni," said the cold, measured voice, "you are accused of wilfully abetting the murder of the late king, and your whole family are suspected of being confederates. What have you to answer to this charge?"

"What I have always answered!" was the vehement reply. "Who dares bring this charge against me?"

"Masolo da Bologna, the king's chamberlain and one of your supposed accomplices, confessed the whole plot with his dying breath, and named you as one of those concerned in it."

"He was no confederate of mine!" replied Philippa, indignantly, "but a base-hearted knave thus to criminate an innocent woman! He could not meet his just punishment, it seems, without seeking to drag me with him. We were no such very loving friends in life that he should wish my companionship in the next world. May Heaven forgive the vile falsehood, but I cannot!"

"This is but trifling," said one of the judges: "even the veriest scoundrel would scarcely die with a falsehood on his soul, and therefore it seems more probable that this is the truth. Time and opportunity will be allowed thee to clear thyself from the accusation; if unfounded, thou wilt be restored to thy former position, but if evidence is too strongly against thee, thou must even suffer according to the laws of the land."

"Then may the holy Virgin aid me!" cried the Catanese, "if I am to be delivered up to the mercy of others! 'Tis a heavy weight, my lords, to have the crime of murder resting on your souls, as ye most assuredly will if I am condemned on the evidence of others, and that too of those who have all along sought my ruin. In bringing forward this charge, first ask yourselves what could have prompted me to such an act. We are not apt to risk our lives as well as our souls for that which brings no reward. I had no cause of enmity against the late king."

"No other cause, perchance, than that which moved the

other conspirators—a device to rid the country of the Hungarians," was the rejoinder.

"Even had I entertained such a desire," said Philippa, "there was not sufficient amity between the conspirators and myself to warrant this accusation; even the guilty must be linked together in friendship, or their plot cannot be executed. Men confide not to enemies crimes which bring the punishment of death."

These remarks seemed to produce some effect upon her judges; they leaned together in earnest conversation for some time, and then one of them interrogated:

"Can you swear by our blessed Lady and all the holy saints, that you knew nought of this base plot until the design of the conspirators had been put in execution? This oath, if taken, may weigh considerably in your favor: but reflect well on its solemn nature, and the everlasting misery which, if false, it will entail upon your soul."

The unfortunate woman remained motionless for some moments, gazing in the faces of her judges with a vacant, bewildered look, as though she but half comprehended their meaning. That very confidence which had been so tremblingly bestowed would cause her ruin! Why was she made the recipient of that fearful secret, which had ever since rested upon her like a dark, clogging weight? Cheeks and lips were ashy pale, as grasping a massive pillar near for support, she bowed her tall form against it, and quivering like an aspen leaf, she ejaculated—

"By our blessed Lady, and all the holy saints—by my hopes of salvation hereafter, I swear that I *am* innocent of the crime imputed to me!"

As she raised her eyes at these words, a cold shudder ran through her frame on meeting the glance of her judges. She had read her *doom;* and from that moment hope fled forever.

"Know you this woman?" they asked, as with a sudden start Philippa beheld Beatrice Vivaldi; who, pale and tearless, with her beautiful hair unbound and floating around her, followed her father, as the guards led them towards the elevated seats occupied by the judges. As the question was put, the young girl raised her eyes towards the Catanese with an inquiring glance, and again the wretched woman seemed to

hear the warning: '*Remember your promise*—let it be sacred, for on it you have perilled your hopes of salvation!'

Again the question was asked: "Know you this woman?"

"I do," replied Philippa faintly.

The judges exchanged looks as they noticed her visible emotion.

"Did she know aught of the plot in question? Had she ever spoken to her of it?"

Their prisoner made no answer, and for some time a silence followed.

In the meantime, Beatrice Vivaldi stood by her father's side overcome with conflicting emotions. She was suspected of being implicated in the murder, had been dragged forth to give her evidence, and in a few minutes, which seemed rapidly wearing on, would be called upon for that evidence. The claims of justice required her to confess the whole plot as she had first overheard it, and thus vindicate Philippa; but then on the other hand, could the tie that bound her to her father be rudely snapped? Could she forget the *daughter's* claims? The young girl was aware that even had she sought to clear the innocent, her story would hardly be listened to, and probably treated as a well-woven tale of deceit and falsehood. The daughter's love triumphed, and she resolved to shield her father, cost what it would.

But of little avail were her resolves on either side; Father Roberto gave a colored version of the interview that passed between them, during which he had performed the office of spy; representing the circumstances so as to make it appear that Philippa and Beatrice were the principal agents in the plot.

"I deny it!" exclaimed the Catanese indignantly. "The whole story is a vile falsehood!"

"What!" cried the monk; "do you then deny, lady, that this interview took place? Was there no withdrawing from the gay saloon on that festal night?—no conference with a carefully masked figure? Your memory seems to fail in this respect."

"Mean, perfidious spy," ejaculated Philippa—"disgrace to the holy office you boast! The time will come when this skilfully wrought falsehood shall meet its just due."

In a cold, distinct tone, the sentence of death was read

against Philippa, Countess of Montoni, and Sancha, Countess Terlizi; the usual application of the torture being omitted in this instance from deference to the orders of the queen.

So sudden had been the seizure, trial, and condemnation, that when the sentence was read, Philippa remained for a moment as one spell-bound; but as the guards approached to convey her back to prison, there to await the execution of the sentence, she rallied her faculties for one last effort, and facing her judges loudly exclaimed:

"And is this the mercy ye show to others? To condemn the innocent on the perverted evidence of one who gives it for the worst of purposes? Are ye fit to act the part of judges, ye whom every idle witness can corrupt? Again I repeat that I am innocent, and if ye regard not my prayers, my blood be upon your heads!"

Those stern men showed not in their countenances the awe her passionate words had inspired; they regarded not her vehement pleadings for liberty, for life; cold, calm, passionless as ever, they motioned to the guards to remove the prisoners from their sight. They were taken back to their solitary dungeon to dream away the few, fleeting hours that yet remained to them, ere the criminal's doom closed their career forever.

Vivaldi was put to the torture to draw forth his confession, and even the delicate Beatrice suffered this cruel punishment on refusing to implicate her father by acknowledging the plot. The goldsmith bore the severe pain unflinchingly, but as the sentence of the court fell upon his ear, and he heard his daughter, the idol of his love, condemned to suffer death for a crime which she had endeavored to prevent, he made a full confession.

"And now, my lords," said he, looking towards Father Roberto, "I have proclaimed that the Countess of Montoni has been most unlawfully accused by a scheming villain in order to revenge his own petty hatred; and here, on the very threshold of death, I repeat that the charge against her is utterly unfounded. As to this young girl," said he, pointing to Beatrice, "she is as innocent of the crime as a helpless infant. She attempted, by every means in her power, to prevent its execution, and this very endeavor has involved her in suspicion. Look at her face, my lords, is it one, think ye, on

which crime is written? Do those soft lines speak of the inward workings of a guilty conscience?"

"Oh! my father!" exclaimed Beatrice, as she threw herself into his arms; "let me die with thee! They cannot, shall not drag thee to the scaffold!"

In spite of her tears and remonstrances, Vivaldi was condemned to death, and immediately led back to prison, while she was pronounced innocent of the charge. Thus was the second scene of her vision fearfully developed before her; but they were not cruel enough to keep the daughter from her father's side during his few short hours of life; and, after the last terrible scene had been enacted, Beatrice withdrew to a distant convent, and buried her blooming beauty within its dreary walls. This was her *reward.*

Despite Vivaldi's confession, public opinion, with respect to Philippa's guilt, remained unshanged, and ere long a messenger was sent to bid her prepare for death on the morrow.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was again eve—that sweet hour, calm and passionless in its beauty as the smooth, unruffled lake. The quiet depths of heaven mirrored forth the beaming stars, those glorious gems of night, and all was as brightly beautiful as though the morrow's sun would not usher in their last hour of life.

A dim, flickering lamp, that hung by its solitary chain from the middle of the roof, threw an unsteady light around that gleamed distinctly across the features of that condemned woman as, with hands clasped in utter abandonment, she had flung herself upon the side of her wretched pallet. The countenance was still beautiful, but it was the wild, fearful beauty of the whirlwind compared to the quiet face of a slumbering landscape. The brow was knit as though with pain, and the eyes gleamed darkly forth, startling in their wild brilliancy. The features were high and noble, the lips tightly compressed together, and in one spot the clenched teeth had forced a streak of crimson blood, as they bit through and through in utter unconsciousness. The long, cloud-like hair had broken from its confinement, and hung loose and floating around her, while her dress was disordered and carelessly arranged, as though earthly things had ceased to interest her.

There was a sound of sobbing in a darkened corner which seemed to bring her back to herself; for, as the haughty woman heard it, her lip curled contemptuously, while she exclaimed:

"Show thyself more of a woman, Sancha! Our enemies may even now be listening, for the office of spy seems to suit them well, and this will be a rare triumph for them. Dry these tears, girl, and meet thy fate unflinchingly. Not one murmur shall they extort from me!"

"Alas!" said the beautiful creature, hopelessly, as, approaching Philippa, she threw herself on her knees beside her;

"must we then die? Die on the public scaffold amid the jeers and taunts of the coarse multitude? And my husband!"

"He will probably meet a like fate," replied Philippa, with forced composure.

"Do not let them murder us!" pleaded the young countess wildly; "beseech, supplicate them to spare our lives! Tell them how horrible it is to die by the hand of the executioner for a crime that others have committed! O! tell them that we are innocent—they cannot refuse our prayers!"

"Listen to me, girl!" exclaimed the Catanese, sternly, as she rose towering before her trembling companion in all the rage of a Pythoness; "listen to me! Not all the diabolical tortures that human cruelty ever invented, should wring from me a groan or a tear! I have avowed my innocence in open court, but they regarded the avowal but as the passing wind, and with fiendish pleasure marked the agony that burned within my soul, as they read the death-sentence. Thinkest thou, that again, I will humble myself to these iron-hearted creatures? Again hear their cold measured tones in answer to my passionate entreaties—my supplications for life? No! should death come in the shape of a slow, consuming fire, I would proudly disdain all cry of anguish and bear firmly up to the last!"

The lady Sancha possessed not the indomitable spirit of Philippa; she could not look as calmly upon approaching disgrace and death, and cowered tremblingly at her feet, while she wept floods of bitter tears.

"Hark!" she exclaimed, while a gleam of hope brightened her countenance; "I hear advancing footsteps. Perhaps they have at length discovered our innocence, and bear the order for our instant release!"

"More likely the order for our instant execution," replied Philippa, gloomily.

But even while she spoke, the head was bent eagerly forward in anxious expectation as the key turned in the lock. So much of doubt and fear, hope and anticipation hangs on the opening of a prison-door! Poor, unfortunate creatures! how were ye doomed to be disappointed!

As Philippa beheld the intruder, her countenance changed

to an expression of fierce hatred, and her hands were convulsively clenched.

"Begone!" she exclaimed; "wretch! inhuman fiend! Why come ye here to disturb my last hours?"

"I come for *revenge!*" said Father Roberto, in a low tone. "I come for *revenge*—'tis indeed sweet to obtain it thus!"

"Revenge!" replied Philippa, bitterly; "is it not sufficient revenge to have caused our ruin—to drag us, innocent as we are, to disgraceful death? Is this not sufficient, that you must come, like a spirit of evil, to gloat over and trample on our misery? Begone, instantly!"

"It is *not* sufficient," he slowly repeated, taking no notice of her passionate command; "it is not sufficient that I see you hurled from your glittering eminence—crushed, humbled before me. This is very sweet, but I would have you recognise the hand that deals the blow—you do not yet know me."

"Not know you!" exclaimed Philippa, as her eyes glared with passion—"Not know you!—I do indeed know you, and as the vilest wretch that ever wore priestly garb! I know you, friar Roberto, as the venomous, crawling reptile that has ever sought to poison my happiness—to mingle your own deadly venom in every cup I drained. I know you as the perjured traitor who, in his schemes to destroy the innocent, has cumbered his soul with an oath, the falseness of which will be hereafter requited. Mark me, abandoned man! the day of reckoning is not far distant."

"You may know me, Philippa, as the holy Father Roberto," replied he, with a sneer; "but you have not always known me as such. Can your memory conjure up no scene of past days? No vision of a murder committed on the solitary shore of the deep, rolling sea, by the humble fishing-hamlet? No remembrance of the youthful stranger who thus silently disappeared?"

As the friar spoke, he removed the cowl which had ever partly concealed his features, and casting back the long sleeve from his right arm, displayed a deep and ghastly scar.

The Catanese gazed for sometime in silent bewilderment; but, as she beheld his features, and the deep, fearful mark, the whole truth rushed upon her mind.

"I see it all now!" she cried; "fiend! More than fiend!

first to pervert the mind of thy victim with unattainable pleasures in order to gratify thine own selfishness—and then, because she gained the end held out to her without thy intervention, with a baseness heretofore unexampled, thou hast contrived her ruin. And well hast thou accomplished it! Too well I know thee, now. Ay! stand and smile, and revel in my wretchedness—'tis a rare feast for thee!"

"What, beautiful Philippa!" said the monk ironically; "so thou canst play the termigant when roused? Truly, those lovely lips seem formed for sweeter words than those just uttered; and thy beautiful eyes, flashing but now with queenly rage, would, methinks, better express some softer emotion." Then drawing near, he added: "Through many years, fair Countess, I have lived upon revenge—I have breathed but in its atmosphere—I have clasped it in my dreams at night as one would clasp a beauteous image; I have pondered on it by day, and at length I have accomplished it. I see thee torn down to thy former level, crushed, humbled before me, and I am satisfied. My ends are answered, and now farewell."

He replaced the cowl, arranged the folds of his robe, and with a salutation of mock reverence, left the dungeon. The key again turned in the lock, and Philippa, leaning back against the couch, wept long and bitterly.

The morrow's sun ushered in their doom, and thus perished the victims of fraud and injustice.

Gaetano, assured of the safety of his master, on being brought to trial confessed the plot, and gave the names of all the conspirators. Raimondo da Napoli was secured by a strong guard in attempting to escape, and brought to trial; where, on the application of the torture, he also confessed, and corroborated the story of the young squire in every particular. Gaetano's innocence was thus proved beyond a doubt; but the stern-hearted judges had him conveyed back to prison, where he languished during a long and dreary imprisonment, until the interposition of Joanna procured his release.

Isolda died soon after the murder of her foster-son, and there being now no impediment, the faithful lover was rewarded with the hand of her whom he had perilled so much to gain. It was a joyful, sunny morning when Isoldina became his bride; both had suffered severely, and their love was

purified by these trials, becoming a clear, shining light upon the path of each, that ceased only with life itself. The unprincipled friar returned to his native country, and history does not say that he met in this life the retribution his crimes so richly deserved.

The open, confiding disposition of the young queen received a severe check, when she beheld her friends dragged to the scaffold on so terrible a charge, that cast a cloud over her after life; and never again did she meet with one who returned her kindness and affection with such faithful, sincere, and respectful devotion as Philippa the Catanese.

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